

THE PARSON'S PROGRESS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The Altar Steps

The Vanity Girl

The Passionate Elopement

Carnival

Sinister Street, Vol. I.

(In America:

Youth's Encounter)

Sinister Street, Vol. II.

Guy and Pauline

(In America:

Plashers Mead)

Sylvia Scarlett

Sylvia and Michael

Poor Relations

Rich Relatives

The Seven Ages of Woman

THE PARSON'S PROGRESS.

By
COMPTON MACKENZIE



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То

N. B. W., L. S. W.,
D. R., and C. C. M.

The author wishes to repudiate most emphatically the existence of any portraits either in this volume or in the preceding volume, THE ALTAR STEPS, or in the final volume, THE HEAVENLY LADDER, with one exception, which is the portrait of Father Rowley. It is impossible in a novel of this character for the wretched author not to hurt somebody's feelings, and he desires to apologize in advance for every corn on which he may unwittingly tread. He takes this opportunity of adding that, with the exception of St. Tugdual's, Nancepean, he is the architect of every church in this volume.

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CHAPTER I

THE NEW CURATE

It was already thawing fast when Mark Lidderdale got into the train at Silchester station; and by the time he alighted at Galton, not much more than an hour afterward, the sweet and gentle westerly air that greeted him on the platform did not mitigate the disgusting orgy of slush to which the roads and pavements of the little country town had surrendered their placid dignity. Mr. Shuter, his Vicar, emerged from the waiting-room to offer Mark a limp blue hand and to mutter with the banality of a very shy man, "Ah, you have arrived," as if the success of catching the 11.15 at Silchester and travelling thence to arrive in Galton at 12.25, without even so much peril as a change of trains, was matter for wonderment and felicitation.

Mark had thought two or three times during the adventurous crawl through Hampshire of what he should say to his Vicar, or perhaps not so much of what he should say as the manner in which he should say, at any rate, something. In the end he achieved:

"How d'ye do, sir? A merry Christmas, if it's not too early in the week to wish that."

Mr. Shuter smiled nervously.

"Thank you, Lidderdale. The—er—same to you."

"I'll go and see that they hoick out my luggage from the van," Mark went on. He had not had the least intention beforehand of assuming this breezy and muscular tone when he met his Vicar, and he laughed at himself

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as he hurried along the train to the luggage van, for he realized that he was trying not to be too much like a curate, and for that very reason succeeding in being perfectly the curate.

"Jews, curates, mothers-in-law, British workmen, shopwalkers . . . all recognized as fair sport for the facetious," he laughed to himself. "But it's only the curate that bothers about trying not to be ridiculous. Who ever heard of a mother-in-law's being self-conscious quâ mother-in-law?"

"Oh, is that my trunk? Thanks very much. Heave it out, will you. There I go again. Confound this dog-collar!"

"The Reverend Mark Lidderdale," a porter read out slowly upon the label. Then he looked at Mark.

"You'll be the Reverend Shuter's new curate," he speculated. "The Reverend Shuter's over there. With a beard. Any more luggage?"

"Only a couple of handbags. They're on the platform, just by where Mr. Shuter is now."

"My two nippers both goes to St. Luke's Sunday school," the porter volunteered as he loaded his trolley with Mark's trunk and wheeled it up the platform.

"Splendid!" the new curate exclaimed fervidly.

"I believe one on 'em brought home some kind of a prize to her Ma last week. But I never wouldn't take on much over Sunday school prizes. They get 'em too easy. That's what I said to my missus when our Reller brought home hers last week. Still, I don't say it wasn't a nice enough book, and it looks nice on our parlour table, what's more. I'll say that for it. You know: it looks bright. And her Ma sees she don't muck it about by reading it."

By this time Mark and the porter had reached the Vicar of St. Luke's.

"Good morning, Willis," the Vicar said coldly, when the porter touched his cap.

"I didn't order a fly," he went on, turning to Mark. "I thought you'd probably prefer a little walk after your journey. The out-porter will bring your luggage down to the Vicarage."

The New Curate

"Elbert!" Willis shouted. "Elbert, you're wanted. This lot down to the Reverend Shuter's!"

Mark and the Vicar dabbled across the dreadful slush of the station yard and presently emerged in High Street.

Galton had been, until twenty years ago, a typical English country town with wide High Street, narrow Market Street, picturesque Market Square, two ancient hostelrys, fine old church, gabled almshouses, and all that was necessary to make it, what it had been for several centuries, the rallying point of a prosperous and beautiful countryside. And then it suddenly began to develop. The water of the insignificant river that flowed through the meadows below the town was found suitable for brewing and for paper-making, and for various other enterprises of a commercial nature that helped to increase the population. It was now a town of eight or nine thousand inhabitants and still growing. Twenty years ago it had not had more than half that number.

The parish of St. Luke's included all the developments. St. Luke's had no High Street, or at any rate only an extension of it that consisted of terraces of small houses, each of which was stamped with a date in florid numerals to mark the development of Galton during the last decade of the nineteenth century. St. Luke's had neither narrow Market Street nor picturesque Market Square nor ancient hostelry nor fine old church nor gabled almshouse, although in the course of the development it had acquired the workhouse, which in the first decade of the nineteenth century had been built at a certain distance from Galton itself, that the old-world charm and comeliness and decency of the little town might not be affronted by any memento of poverty. And now that very workhouse, by the ironical process of time, was the only bit of old-world charm and comeliness and decency in the whole of St. Luke's parish.

"Willis, the porter who got your trunk out of the van, is a parishioner," Mr. Shuter explained after he had paused for a moment at the top of the steep, short hill that marked the beginning of High Street and indicated with a feeble wave of the arm the glories of Galton below. Forthwith he turned to the right with his curate and

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led him away from the land flowing with milk and honey into the desert of St. Luke's.

"He was telling me that his children go to our Sunday school," Mark said.

"Yes," Mr. Shuter sniffed, "for what they can get out of it. Willis hasn't been inside the church since I've been here."

Mark told himself that it should not be beyond the province of a youthful deacon to go and give Willis a prod on the subject of church attendance. He marked down Willis in his mind's eye as one of the first victims of his visiting. It would be something of a triumph to secure Willis.

"I'll look him up," he announced.

The Vicar turned round and stared at his curate with watery pale blue eyes.

"I don't think I should waste very much time on him," he sniffed.

"I had an amusing encounter this morning at Silchester railway station, sir," Mark began, to divert the conversation. "As I was taking my ticket, a Salvation Army lassie came up to me and said: 'Young man, what class are you travelling?' 'Third class,' I told her. 'You'll never get to the end of your journey that class,' she said. 'Won't I?' said I. 'I've never travelled anything but third so far, and I've always managed to get to my destination safely.' Whereupon she shook her head at me and said with a sigh, 'Ah, young man, the journey you mean is an earthly one, but the journey I mean is a heavenly one.' And then she caught sight of my collar. 'Oh, I beg pardon,' she said. 'I didn't notice you were a minister.'"

The Vicar shook his head gloomily.

"These misguided creatures do more harm than they wot of to religion," he sighed. "One always hopes that they are sincere, but their lack of education is so dangerous—so very dangerous."

Mark did not feel that his story had had a success, and he was silent for the length of a terrace, at the end of which he could produce nothing better than a remark upon the rapidity of the thaw.

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"It was really wonderful in Silchester yesterday, sir. I don't think that during the whole of my time there I was ever so much moved by the outward scene. The quietness of the snow, and the cathedral carrying such a weight of it. Really awe-inspiring, sir."

"Yes, snow is very pretty while it lasts," the Vicar agreed. "While it lasts. Yes. Oh—and—er—by the way—er—Lidderdale, I'd rather you didn't call me 'sir.' I don't mean anything unpleasant. But it might give rise to the idea that I had asked you to call me 'sir,' which I shouldn't like. It might appear rather pretentious. Yes, I think I should prefer to be addressed as 'Vicar.'"

The expression of all this caused Mr. Shuter considerable embarrassment and such fidgeting from one foot to the other that he ended by fidgeting himself off the pavement into a quagmire of slush.

"This is Jubilee Terrace," he said, pointing out to Mark a dozen cream-coloured houses, the pediment of which was stamped like an iced cake *Jubilee Terrace, 1897*.

Mark looked at the houses as he might have looked at a dull group of statuary in a museum, and then, feeling guilty of displaying a lack of interest, he hurriedly exclaimed with a kind of patriotic assertiveness:

"Part of our parish!"

"Oh, yes," the Vicar said. "We have been in my—in the—in our parish practically since we turned to the right up the main road. I thought you'd understood that. Why I pointed out Jubilee Terrace was because the next turning on the left, the turning down which we are—er—turning at this moment is the turning—the street, St. Luke's Street, in which the church is situated."

Mark did not remind the Vicar that he had already been shown the church when he came down here last autumn to obtain a title. He tried to regard St. Luke's, Galton, as if Ely or Wells or Canterbury were being offered for the first time to his astonished gaze.

St. Luke's was an edifice built of stone and red brick in the Early English style. It lacked any kind of distinguishing feature. It was stock size, stock shape, the

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stock of an architect who had probably 'gone in for' architecture because he could draw a cone fairly accurately at school and perhaps cared more for playing with bricks than with lead soldiers.

"We might spend a few minutes before lunch in looking round," the Vicar suggested. "At least—no, perhaps not—for I think that Mrs. Middleditch may be expecting us."

The sombre figure of the housekeeper disappeared within the Vicarage, a small gothic house covered with a mat of ampelopsis, that horrid railway-signal of the vegetable world which turns from green to red and has made so many beautiful buildings ugly and twenty times as many ugly buildings uglier still.

"Mrs. Middleditch is very punctual," the Vicar explained. "I think that we had better postpone our look round the church until after lunch." He led the way along the slushy path between garden-beds billowy with melting snow that resembled dirty linen in a wash-tub.

The furniture of the house was defiantly Oriental, the result, Mark found later on, of his Vicar's being the son of an Indian chaplain. There are many ways of furnishing a house hideously and many ways of furnishing it uncomfortably; but there is no way that so unhappily combines both as the style of the Orient adapted to the uses of the Occident. Jugs, plaques, fretted Moorish tables, carved bellows, and large cracked vases filled the drawing-room. From the walls of the Vicar's study the four major prophets looked down in chromolithographic severity upon the ninety-odd faded sea-green volumes of Parker's Anglo-Catholic Theologians peeping like odalisques through the latticed windows of the seraglio. Mark's bedroom had a view of the church roof, and he had been allotted a small sitting-room, which he was relieved to find was austere furnished with a wicker arm-chair, two empty bookcases, a table, and an Arundel print of the Last Supper. He had dreaded the atmosphere of the bazaar all over again.

"I'm afraid this looks a little empty," Mr. Shuter suggested.

Mark hastily reassured him.

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"I thought you might have some things of your own, perhaps," Mr. Shuter went on.

And it suddenly struck Mark for the first time in his life that, apart from a handful of books and a few clothes, he had no things of his own.

"Lunch is on the table," Mrs. Middleditch proclaimed in the doorway. She glared so fiercely at Mark that he nearly expressed a hope that he had not inconvenienced her by being given this room. He could not fancy that any woman would glare so fiercely unless she had suffered some injury from the person at whom she was glaring.

Mrs. Middleditch appeared like one of those heavy pieces of upholstery stuffed with horsehair that caused the inside of one's knees such discomfort in the days of knickerbockers. The material of her dress had the same blackish sheen, and the protuberances of her form had more affinity with broken springs than with the swelling contours of middle-aged womanhood. Her wiry hair resembled less the sparse but seemly growth upon the middle-aged female head than an escape of stuffing through a rent in the material. Even her face gave an effect of wood from which the varnish had been rubbed, and it appeared not wrinkled, but chipped and scratched by hard wear. Mark's diaconal charity was tried severely by Mrs. Middleditch, because she insisted on regarding him as a young man whose only object in life was to tempt the Vicar into unpunctuality with 'new-fangled services.' Her idea of religion was of some hydra-headed monster that went about upsetting the order and comfort of a household. Every Sunday morning, when the Vicar refused to break his fast until he had celebrated at midday, Mrs. Middleditch lost her temper; and when she attended Morning Prayer she sniffed and snorted in her pew and stalked ostentatiously out of church the moment she had contributed her penny to the offertory. Once long ago the Vicar had expressed his desire that she should remain until the end of the 'second service' in order to set an example to the parish.

"And what about your dinner, Mr. Shuter?" she had demanded. "Do you think it's my duty as a Christian woman to loll about in church when you haven't had bite

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nor sup since yesterday, and keep you waiting when you do get back while I get your dinner? That's not my notion of true religion, Mr. Shuter. My notion of true religion is doing one's duty in that state of life in which it has pleased God to call me. And He's called me to see you get your dinner punctual to the minute, which you can't say I'm not. I've been known for my punctuality since I was an infant at the breast. You'll pardon me for mentioning such matters, and I wouldn't if you wasn't a clergyman. But many's the time my poor mother's said to me, 'Sophia,' she's said, 'even when you was an infant in my arms,' she's said, 'you'd scream the house down if I was so much as half a minute late in giving you the breast.' Yes, and I made Mr. Middleditch punctual before he died, though when he married me he was known far and wide as a man who could not be up to time. Not for nothing. Why, if you'll believe what I'm telling you, he actually kept me ten minutes in my bridal gown, and I gave him such a perishing look when we kneeled down together in front of the clergyman that anyone would have said I was forbidding the banns instead of taking him for better or worse. But I cured him before he died. He grew so afraid of being late that he used to keep two watches, one in each pocket of his waistcoat, and a gold chain he won in a raffle for building a Ladies' Chapel at St. Philip's, Willesden, which was where we used to attend."

When Mr. Shuter related this tale Mark was equally astonished by the Vicar's expansiveness and by Mrs. Middleditch's flow of eloquence. He always found her silent even to the pitch of appearing morose. Incidentally he decided that Mrs. Middleditch had what some of the young women parishioners would have called a 'nerve' to mind at what hour one came in to eat her disgusting meals. She was assisted by an impetuous girl called Caroline, on tiptoe with benevolence, who by the irony of language 'waited' at table. Mr. Shuter or Mark had only to look up from their plates for a brief instant for Caroline to charge down upon them with salt-cellar or bread or bottle of Worcester sauce. With Mrs. Middleditch's cooking it was usually one of these that they

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required, although as often as not they received them in their laps.

One morning, about a month after Mark had been in Galton, while he was wrestling with that considerable progress in knowledge both of Holy Scripture and of Doctrine which the Bishop would expect before he made him a priest, Caroline was dusting his room.

"I'm not disturbing you, I hope, Mr. Lidderdale?"

Mark shook his head. She was disturbing him extremely, because Caroline's dusting was like a desperate butterfly chase; but he was much too sensible of her goodwill to wound her feelings by telling her so.

"I always do say, and I always shall, a bit of dusting brightens up things. Oh, Mr. Lidderdale!"

"What's the matter?" Mark exclaimed. He thought for a moment that Caroline was upon the verge of a fit, because she was standing red-faced in the middle of the room, gazing at him with open mouth.

"Why, I had something on the tip of my tongue I've been waiting to arst you ever since you came, and I as near as nothing arst you then. It give me sech a turn when I thought what I'd nearly been and arst you."

Mark put down Butler's *Analogy* and smiled at her encouragingly.

"Ask away. You needn't be afraid of me."

"Oh, of course I'm not afraid," Caroline giggled. "Only I don't like to arst you, not what it was on the tip of my tongue to arst."

She renewed her dusting with added violence, while Mark re-embarked on the *Analogy*.

"Well, I think I've given your room a good dusting, Mr. Lidderdale," Caroline declared at last.

"Splendid!" Mark agreed enthusiastically. Then, just as she was charging out of his room, he called to her:

"Would you kindly tell Mrs. Middleditch that I shan't be home for lunch to-day?"

"Well, and I will, so now," Caroline declared. "I hope you won't think it's a funny thing for a girl to arst anyone, but I *would* like it if you could call me Carrie."

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With this she flung herself out of the room, leaving Mark to wonder if she intended to give his message to Mrs. Middleditch. But he was touched by Caroline's desire that he should call her Carrie. It seemed to him of good omen and that he was going to be able to reach people's hearts after all, for during this month he had lost a certain amount of confidence in himself.

CHAPTER II

TWO LETTERS

CHRISTMAS fell on a Sunday that year, and on the Wednesday night, three days after he had arrived in Galton, Mark sat up late to write a packet of seasonable letters, two of which being something more than seasonable are reproduced:

The first of these was to Stephen Ogilvie at Wych-on-the-Wold :

St. Luke's Vicarage,
Galton,
Hants.
St. Thomas's Day.

My dear Rector,

Here I am, trying not to look in shop-windows as I go by to see if I really am a clergyman at last. And I really am. I've even heard myself referred to as the Reverend Lidderdale. And I've said my first Morning Prayer and my first Evening Prayer. I alternate with the Vicar. There were only two people at Morning Prayer, and one of them had come in to shelter from the weather, I fancy. There were five or six at Evening Prayer, all of them church fowls as Dorward used to call them. By the way, next week on my day off I shall try to walk over to Green Lanes and look up Dorward. I hear that he's more deliciously absurd than ever.

I've not seen Galton to much advantage yet, for it has never once stopped raining since I got here, and I've spent most of my time being led round the parish by my Vicar. In the course of this I've already realized what a tremendous handicap it is to be a priest. No doubt as I get used to it I shall forget the greater freedom of laity, and suppose that the attitude of the people one meets is the normal attitude of everybody on being introduced to

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a stranger. But at the moment I am acutely aware of the difference. It seems to me that the dog-collar we wear is like a ring fence cutting us off from humanity. Perhaps some of my feeling on this point can be discounted as the natural self-consciousness of one who finds himself in the position of being a genuine curate's egg curate. You see, one is so very much the new curate in a place like Galton. I dare say that the Bishop was wise in making me come here instead of going to Rowley in Shoreditch, and I dare say that it's an admirable mortification for one's pride. But I do hate it.

'Not much mortification here,' you'll say, for of course I have no business to be writing about my 'position' like a land agent who cannot induce the tenants to treat him as the squire. However, I shall never lose the habit of giving myself away to you. You've brought it on yourself by your goodness and patience, and I know that you would rather I wrote as freely and frankly to you now as I used to write when you first pulled me out of that purgatory of Slowbridge, not so very long ago either. Only eight years. It seems scarcely creditable, as our housekeeper says. I wish you could see Mrs. Middleditch. You wouldn't worry any more about my mortification. Mrs. Middleditch mortifies me hourly. I'm dreading what she'll say to my first sermon on Christmas night. I'll write and let you know how that goes off.

The people I've met so far are not very interesting. Dr. Jayne and Mr. Richbell, a solicitor, are our churchwardens and chief parishioners; but the real grandees of the town are all in the fold of St. Swithun's, the old parish church. My Vicar assures me that I have made a favourable impression on both the churchwardens. This is a good thing, as I understand that between them they guarantee half my stipend. I regard them with awe. It's an alarming thing to know that one is dependent for one's daily bread on two people like that. It makes one feel more like a clerk than a cleric. We are not a rich parish, but neither are we poor. We are terrifically respectable, and of course as the curate, wherever I go, I get the respectability at its most respectable. I hear that there is an amusing collection of oddities about a mile

Two Letters

outside the town who live in tin bungalows. It will be rather a relief to 'visit' them. At least I hope it will be, but perhaps they will turn out as respectable as the rest of the parish. If they do, I shall have to be patient till the hoppers come next September. Their annual invasion is alluded to with such horror by everybody that I'm sure they must be great fun. My rival curate at St. Swithun's is a breezy young man who is always known as Tom Hartley. He's the shining light of the Galton cricket team, and slogs so hard that people marvel at him. I fancy that slogging like his makes them feel that there may be something in religion after all. There's no doubt that the sporting parson carries a lot of conviction. People don't treat them like professionals, professional parsons I mean. They're regarded as gifted amateurs in clerical attire. "There must be something in it after all," I fancy I hear them say. "Otherwise would a jolly fellow and fine cricketer like Tom Hartley take it up?" But I, who can't hit a ball or sit on a horse, am the real professional devil-dodger, and I have as little chance of being regarded as a human being as a Jew in the Middle Ages.

The Rector of St. Swithun's is the Reverend Christopher Tower, with all the pompousness but not much of the ability of the average archdeacon. He is a large, florid creature, beautifully shaved and perfectly dressed. He was dreadfully taken aback when he found that I hadn't been to Oxford or Cambridge. He himself was at Oxford. We had only the briefest of interviews, and that was in the full flood of the Christmas traffic in High Street; but I am to dine at the Rectory soon, when no doubt I shall hear that he was at Eton too. He looked at my stock suspiciously and said, opening wide his bland and foolish eyes, "I hope you're not going to introduce a very advanced ritual at St. Luke's. The people here will never take to it. We are simple folk in Galton and very conservative." I wanted to say that Catholicism was a great deal more conservative than Protestantism, but a motor backed into a passing farm cart at that moment, and in the popular excitement I lost him.

Why do I go on writing this silly gossip? The real reason is that I want to postpone saying anything about

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my own Vicar, because I don't believe that we are going to get on. You'll think that it is unpardonable of me to write this about him already. It is. But I know that his timidity is going to revolt me. I ought never to have accepted a title from him, and I don't think that the Bishop of Silchester ought to have forced him on me and me on him, as he did. When I came down here in the autumn to see him, I came here full of gratitude to the Bishop for not making me wait another year for ordination, and determined to think that he knew better than myself what was good for me. I accepted my future Vicar's timidity as moderation and tact. I thought I discovered behind his shyness a good deal of spiritual force. But he's a withered man, and his parish is a heap of dead leaves. I renounce for ever the theory that people can be led gradually into the Catholic Faith, that the Catholic Faith can be administered to them as one administers grey powders in jam to children. When priests talk of managing early Eucharists twice a week, at which they wear vestments in the way English people drink whisky in a public house, my heart is hardened against them. This parish is dried up. I have not come across one solitary person who is really any nearer to the Catholic Faith than the parishioners of St. Swithun's, which doesn't pretend to do anything more than maintain the convention that it is gentlemanly and ladylike to attend church every Sunday at eleven o'clock. But my Vicar believes more than that, and he is afraid to hurt people's feelings. He has a few church fowls who attend his early Eucharist; but they attend because he is a widower and because they are spinsters, not because he is a priest and they are Catholics anxious to worship Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. You'll say when you read this that I have no right in three days to make such sweeping assertions. But if I were suddenly planted down in the middle of the Sahara, I should know that it was dry. And Galton is dry. I smell the dryness.

But don't think because I write in this strain that I am going to despair of doing anything here either for myself or for other people. And don't think because I have misgivings about getting on with my Vicar that I

Two Letters

shan't for that very reason make all the more determined an effort to get on with him well.

Christmas always does depress me. It ought to mean so much, and it seems to mean so little really. Yet I suppose we should be grateful that it still means anything at all.

Anyway, I remember Wych-on-the-Wold and Christmas there, and I wish I could be there with you.

Always most affectionately,

M. L.

I shall think of you at Mass on St. Stephen's Day.

The other letter was to Father Rowley, the first Mark had written to him since his return from preaching all round the world to collect the money to pay off the debt on St. Agnes', Chatsea.

St. Luke's Vicarage,

Galton,

Hants.

St. Thomas's Day.

My dear Father Rowley,

I only heard last week from the Bishop of Silchester that you had accepted Holy Innocents', Shoreditch, and that you had most kindly expressed a wish to have me as one of your assistant clergy. I'm afraid I felt a momentary resentment at coming here instead, for you know that I would sooner be with you than with any priest. I haven't had much time to settle down here. In fact, I only arrived on Monday. I'm feeling rather depressed about the place at present. I'm bound to say that the Bishop prophesied last week that I should be depressed, and I think that he wants me to be depressed.

I do hope that you will make Holy Innocents' another St. Agnes'. But of course you will. How glad you must be that the debt is cleared off at last. I'm happy to think that the Americans appreciated you. I hear that they wanted to make you Dean of some cathedral or other. Was it Chicago? The notion of you as a Dean filled me with joy. What a business you would have found it to button up your gaiters!

I intend to stick it here for as long as my Vicar will

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stock of an architect who had probably 'gone in for' architecture because he could draw a cone fairly accurately at school and perhaps cared more for playing with bricks than with lead soldiers.

"We might spend a few minutes before lunch in looking round," the Vicar suggested. "At least—no, perhaps not—for I think that Mrs. Middleditch may be expecting us."

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The New Curate

"I thought you might have some things of your own, perhaps," Mr. Shuter went on.

And it suddenly struck Mark for the first time in his life that, apart from a handful of books and a few clothes, he had no things of his own.

"Lunch is on the table," Mrs. Middleditch proclaimed in the doorway. She glared so fiercely at Mark that he nearly expressed a hope that he had not inconvenienced her by being given this room. He could not fancy that any woman would glare so fiercely unless she had suffered some injury from the person at whom she was glaring.

Mrs. Middleditch appeared like one of those heavy pieces of upholstery stuffed with horsehair that caused the inside of one's knees such discomfort in the days of knickerbockers. The material of her dress had the same blackish sheen, and the protuberances of her form had more affinity with broken springs than with the swelling contours of middle-aged womanhood. Her wiry hair resembled less the sparse but seemly growth upon the middle-aged female head than an escape of stuffing through a rent in the material. Even her face gave an effect of wood from which the varnish had been rubbed, and it appeared not wrinkled, but chipped and scratched by hard wear. Mark's diaconal charity was tried severely by Mrs. Middleditch, because she insisted on regarding him as a young man whose only object in life was to tempt the Vicar into unpunctuality with 'new-fangled services.' Her idea of religion was of some hydra-headed monster that went about upsetting the order and comfort of a household. Every Sunday morning, when the Vicar refused to break his fast until he had celebrated at midday, Mrs. Middleditch lost her temper; and when she attended Morning Prayer she sniffed and snorted in her pew and stalked ostentatiously out of church the moment she had contributed her penny to the offertory. Once long ago the Vicar had expressed his desire that she should remain until the end of the 'second service' in order to set an example to the parish.

"And what about your dinner, Mr. Shuter? she had demanded. "Do you think it's my duty as a Christian woman to loll about in church when you haven't had bite

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nor sup since yesterday, and keep you waiting when you do get back while I get your dinner? That's not my notion of true religion, Mr. Shuter. My notion of true religion is doing one's duty in that state of life in which it has pleased God to call me. And He's called me to see you get your dinner punctual to the minute, which you can't say I'm not. I've been known for my punctuality since I was an infant at the breast. You'll pardon me for mentioning such matters, and I wouldn't if you wasn't a clergyman. But many's the time my poor mother's said to me, 'Sophia,' she's said, 'even when you was an infant in my arms,' she's said, 'you'd scream the house down if I was so much as half a minute late in giving you the breast.' Yes, and I made Mr. Middleditch punctual before he died, though when he married me he was known far and wide as a man who could not be up to time. Not for nothing. Why, if you'll believe what I'm telling you, he actually kept me ten minutes in my bridal gown, and I gave him such a perishing look when we kneeled down together in front of the clergyman that anyone would have said I was forbidding the banns instead of taking him for better or worse. But I cured him before he died. He grew so afraid of being late that he used to keep two watches, one in each pocket of his waistcoat, and a gold chain he won in a raffle for building a Ladies' Chapel at St. Philip's, Willesden, which was where we used to attend."

When Mr. Shuter related this tale Mark was equally astonished by the Vicar's expansiveness and by Mrs. Middleditch's flow of eloquence. He always found her silent even to the pitch of appearing morose. Incidentally he decided that Mrs. Middleditch had what some of the young women parishioners would have called a 'nerve' to mind at what hour one came in to eat her disgusting meals. She was assisted by an impetuous girl called Caroline, on tiptoe with benevolence, who by the irony of language 'waited' at table. Mr. Shuter or Mark had only to look up from their plates for a brief instant for Caroline to charge down upon them with salt-cellar or bread or bottle of Worcester sauce. With Mrs. Middleditch's cooking it was usually one of these that they

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required, although as often as not they received them in their laps.

One morning, about a month after Mark had been in Galton, while he was wrestling with that considerable progress in knowledge both of Holy Scripture and of Doctrine which the Bishop would expect before he made him a priest, Caroline was dusting his room.

"I'm not disturbing you, I hope, Mr. Lidderdale?"

Mark shook his head. She was disturbing him extremely, because Caroline's dusting was like a desperate butterfly chase; but he was much too sensible of her goodwill to wound her feelings by telling her so.

"I always do say, and I always shall, a bit of dusting brightens up things. Oh, Mr. Lidderdale!"

"What's the matter?" Mark exclaimed. He thought for a moment that Caroline was upon the verge of a fit, because she was standing red-faced in the middle of the room, gazing at him with open mouth.

"Why, I had something on the tip of my tongue I've been waiting to arst you ever since you came, and I as near as nothing arst you then. It give me sech a turn when I thought what I'd nearly been and arst you."

Mark put down Butler's *Analogy* and smiled at her encouragingly.

"Ask away. You needn't be afraid of me."

"Oh, of course I'm not afraid," Caroline giggled. "Only I don't like to arst you, not what it was on the tip of my tongue to arst."

She renewed her dusting with added violence, while Mark re-embarked on the *Analogy*.

"Well, I think I've given your room a good dusting, Mr. Lidderdale," Caroline declared at last.

"Splendid!" Mark agreed enthusiastically. Then, just as she was charging out of his room, he called to her:

"Would you kindly tell Mrs. Middleditch that I shan't be home for lunch to-day?"

"Well, and I will, so now," Caroline declared. "I hope you won't think it's a funny thing for a girl to arst anyone, but I *would* like it if you could call me Carrie."

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With this she flung herself out of the room, leaving Mark to wonder if she intended to give his message to Mrs. Middleditch. But he was touched by Caroline's desire that he should call her Carrie. It seemed to him of good omen and that he was going to be able to reach people's hearts after all, for during this month he had lost a certain amount of confidence in himself.

CHAPTER II

TWO LETTERS

CHRISTMAS fell on a Sunday that year, and on the Wednesday night, three days after he had arrived in Galton, Mark sat up late to write a packet of seasonable letters, two of which being something more than seasonable are reproduced:

The first of these was to Stephen Ogilvie at Wych-on-the-Wold :

St. Luke's Vicarage,
Galton,
Hants.
St. Thomas's Day.

My dear Rector,

Here I am, trying not to look in shop-windows as I go by to see if I really am a clergyman at last. And I really am. I've even heard myself referred to as the Reverend Lidderdale. And I've said my first Morning Prayer and my first Evening Prayer. I alternate with the Vicar. There were only two people at Morning Prayer, and one of them had come in to shelter from the weather, I fancy. There were five or six at Evening Prayer, all of them church fowls as Dorward used to call them. By the way, next week on my day off I shall try to walk over to Green Lanes and look up Dorward. I hear that he's more deliciously absurd than ever.

I've not seen Galton to much advantage yet, for it has never once stopped raining since I got here, and I've spent most of my time being led round the parish by my Vicar. In the course of this I've already realized what a tremendous handicap it is to be a priest. No doubt as I get used to it I shall forget the greater freedom of laity, and suppose that the attitude of the people one meets is the normal attitude of everybody on being introduced to

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a stranger. But at the moment I am acutely aware of the difference. It seems to me that the dog-collar we wear is like a ring fence cutting us off from humanity. Perhaps some of my feeling on this point can be discounted as the natural self-consciousness of one who finds himself in the position of being a genuine curate's egg curate. You see, one is so very much the new curate in a place like Galton. I dare say that the Bishop was wise in making me come here instead of going to Rowley in Shoreditch, and I dare say that it's an admirable mortification for one's pride. But I do hate it.

'Not much mortification here,' you'll say, for of course I have no business to be writing about my 'position' like a land agent who cannot induce the tenants to treat him as the squire. However, I shall never lose the habit of giving myself away to you. You've brought it on yourself by your goodness and patience, and I know that you would rather I wrote as freely and frankly to you now as I used to write when you first pulled me out of that purgatory of Slowbridge, not so very long ago either. Only eight years. It seems scarcely creditable, as our housekeeper says. I wish you could see Mrs. Middleditch. You wouldn't worry any more about my mortification. Mrs. Middleditch mortifies me hourly. I'm dreading what she'll say to my first sermon on Christmas night. I'll write and let you know how that goes off.

The people I've met so far are not very interesting. Dr. Jayne and Mr. Richbell, a solicitor, are our churchwardens and chief parishioners; but the real grandees of the town are all in the fold of St. Swithun's, the old parish church. My Vicar assures me that I have made a favourable impression on both the churchwardens. This is a good thing, as I understand that between them they guarantee half my stipend. I regard them with awe. It's an alarming thing to know that one is dependent for one's daily bread on two people like that. It makes one feel more like a clerk than a cleric. We are not a rich parish, but neither are we poor. We are terrifically respectable, and of course as the curate, wherever I go, I get the respectability at its most respectable. I hear that there is an amusing collection of oddities about a mile

Two Letters

outside the town who live in tin bungalows. It will be rather a relief to 'visit' them. At least I hope it will be, but perhaps they will turn out as respectable as the rest of the parish. If they do, I shall have to be patient till the hoppers come next September. Their annual invasion is alluded to with such horror by everybody that I'm sure they must be great fun. My rival curate at St. Swithun's is a breezy young man who is always known as Tom Hartley. He's the shining light of the Galton cricket team, and slogs so hard that people marvel at him. I fancy that slogging like his makes them feel that there may be something in religion after all. There's no doubt that the sporting parson carries a lot of conviction. People don't treat them like professionals, professional parsons I mean. They're regarded as gifted amateurs in clerical attire. "There must be something in it after all," I fancy I hear them say. "Otherwise would a jolly fellow and fine cricketer like Tom Hartley take it up?" But I, who can't hit a ball or sit on a horse, am the real professional devil-dodger, and I have as little chance of being regarded as a human being as a Jew in the Middle Ages.

The Rector of St. Swithun's is the Reverend Christopher Tower, with all the pompousness but not much of the ability of the average archdeacon. He is a large, florid creature, beautifully shaved and perfectly dressed. He was dreadfully taken aback when he found that I hadn't been to Oxford or Cambridge. He himself was at Oxford. We had only the briefest of interviews, and that was in the full flood of the Christmas traffic in High Street; but I am to dine at the Rectory soon, when no doubt I shall hear that he was at Eton too. He looked at my stock suspiciously and said, opening wide his bland and foolish eyes, "I hope you're not going to introduce a very advanced ritual at St. Luke's. The people here will never take to it. We are simple folk in Galton and very conservative." I wanted to say that Catholicism was a great deal more conservative than Protestantism, but a motor backed into a passing farm cart at that moment, and in the popular excitement I lost him.

Why do I go on writing this silly gossip? The real reason is that I want to postpone saying anything about

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my own Vicar, because I don't believe that we are going to get on. You'll think that it is unpardonable of me to write this about him already. It is. But I know that his timidity is going to revolt me. I ought never to have accepted a title from him, and I don't think that the Bishop of Silchester ought to have forced him on me and me on him, as he did. When I came down here in the autumn to see him, I came here full of gratitude to the Bishop for not making me wait another year for ordination, and determined to think that he knew better than myself what was good for me. I accepted my future Vicar's timidity as moderation and tact. I thought I discovered behind his shyness a good deal of spiritual force. But he's a withered man, and his parish is a heap of dead leaves. I renounce for ever the theory that people can be led gradually into the Catholic Faith, that the Catholic Faith can be administered to them as one administers grey powders in jam to children. When priests talk of managing early Eucharists twice a week, at which they wear vestments in the way English people drink whisky in a public house, my heart is hardened against them. This parish is dried up. I have not come across one solitary person who is really any nearer to the Catholic Faith than the parishioners of St. Swithun's, which doesn't pretend to do anything more than maintain the convention that it is gentlemanly and ladylike to attend church every Sunday at eleven o'clock. But my Vicar believes more than that, and he is afraid to hurt people's feelings. He has a few church fowls who attend his early Eucharist; but they attend because he is a widower and because they are spinsters, not because he is a priest and they are Catholics anxious to worship Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. You'll say when you read this that I have no right in three days to make such sweeping assertions. But if I were suddenly planted down in the middle of the Sahara, I should know that it was dry. And Galton is dry. I smell the dryness.

But don't think because I write in this strain that I am going to despair of doing anything here either for myself or for other people. And don't think because I have misgivings about getting on with my Vicar that I

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shan't for that very reason make all the more determined an effort to get on with him well.

Christmas always does depress me. It ought to mean so much, and it seems to mean so little really. Yet I suppose we should be grateful that it still means anything at all.

Anyway, I remember Wych-on-the-Wold and Christmas there, and I wish I could be there with you.

*Always most affectionately,
M. L.*

I shall think of you at Mass on St. Stephen's Day.

The other letter was to Father Rowley, the first Mark had written to him since his return from preaching all round the world to collect the money to pay off the debt on St. Agnes', Chatsea.

St. Luke's Vicarage,
Galton,
Hants.
St. Thomas's Day.

My dear Father Rowley,

I only heard last week from the Bishop of Silchester that you had accepted Holy Innocents', Shoreditch, and that you had most kindly expressed a wish to have me as one of your assistant clergy. I'm afraid I felt a momentary resentment at coming here instead, for you know that I would sooner be with you than with any priest. I haven't had much time to settle down here. In fact, I only arrived on Monday. I'm feeling rather depressed about the place at present. I'm bound to say that the Bishop prophesied last week that I should be depressed, and I think that he wants me to be depressed.

I do hope that you will make Holy Innocents' another St. Agnes'. But of course you will. How glad you must be that the debt is cleared off at last. I'm happy to think that the Americans appreciated you. I hear that they wanted to make you Dean of some cathedral or other. Was it Chicago? The notion of you as a Dean filled me with joy. What a business you would have found it to button up your gaiters!

I intend to stick it here for as long as my Vicar will

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put up with me, but I want to wring from you a promise that my coming to you is only postponed. I preach my first sermon on Sunday evening. I am relieved you won't hear that. It's my chief consolation for not being with you this Christmas. I can imagine what it must be like in Shoreditch. All your old friends will surely be with you this Christmas to welcome you back to England.

I do pray that the Holy Spirit will bless your new mission. You will, I know, pray for me. I feel so unutterably feeble now that I am a deacon, and doubtless I really am just as feeble as I seem to myself. I meant to bore you with a long account of St. Luke's, Galton. But you can guess what it's like without my telling you.

Yours ever,

Mark Lidderdale.

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST SERMON

MARK had written out his Christmas sermon with a good deal of care and an excessive reliance on what other preachers had said before him; but when he read it over for the tenth time after tea it struck him as so utterly inadequate to the occasion he desired to celebrate that he was tempted to throw the manuscript into the fire and preach extempore, trusting to the inspiration of the moment when he ascended the pulpit. And if he should break down? If, when he faced the congregation, he should find himself unable to frame one complete sentence, or even to utter one intelligible word after the invocation of the Holy Trinity? He had hoped that the Vicar would have made some inquiries about his sermon, so that he might have found an excuse to read it over to him and obtain his criticism. But Mr. Shuter had not mentioned his sermon after he had let him know by letter that he would be called upon to preach at Evening Prayer. The fact was that the Vicar was himself in such a state of nervous agitation over the first introduction of a cope to the worshippers at St. Luke's that he had no attention to spare for Mark and his first sermon.

The deacon looked at his manuscript ruefully.

"It reads like a Sunday School essay," he muttered to himself. "Twenty past five already!" He jumped up from his chair and hurried downstairs to the Vicar's study.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Vicar," he began.

"Not at all. Not at all," said the Vicar, blinking at his curate with watery blue eyes.

"It's about my sermon."

"Oh, yes. Don't make it too long. They won't want

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to be kept late to-night. So many people will be having Christmas gatherings."

"It takes about a quarter of an hour to read aloud," Mark said.

"There's not likely to be a large congregation this evening," the Vicar went on.

Mark supposed that he was intending to allay his nervousness, but it seemed that he was allaying his own.

"I don't think that I could have chosen a more suitable occasion to wear the cope for the first time. If the opposition is not very noticeable, I might introduce vestments at the midday Eucharist next Easter. But I don't want to alienate those who are just beginning to appreciate the idea of lending greater dignity to the worship of Almighty God. I do hope there won't be a great deal of opposition."

"There's more likely to be opposition to my sermon," Mark said in a feeble attempt to hide his growing dismay behind an appearance of facetious unconcern.

"Opposition to your sermon?" the Vicar repeated gravely. "Surely, Lidderdale, I made it perfectly clear that I was most anxious to avoid anything likely to cause offence. We cannot afford to be extreme. We cannot afford it," he repeated in a voice tremulous with the passion of self-justification. "You young men come fresh from theological colleges and think that you can effect in one moment what cannot be effected in years."

"But I was referring to the badness of my sermon, Vicar; to its dullness, not to any likelihood of its shocking anybody. Perhaps you would be kind enough to read it and let me know if there's anything I ought to leave out?"

The Vicar took the manuscript and glanced through it. But his mind was not with Mark's sermon; and when at half-past five the church bell began to ring, he hastily put aside the sermon and began to gather up his things.

"There's one point I shall make if anybody does object to my introducing the cope at Solemn Evensong," he said. "I shall be able to cite the Bishop as an example. In fact, I shall say that I feel, in view of the Bishop's action in being photographed in cope and mitre, that there cannot

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possibly be the slightest objection to my wearing a cope at any rate in this diocese."

"And you think the sermon will do?" Mark pressed.

"The sermon? Oh yes, Lidderdale. I saw nothing to criticize. But get through it as quickly as you can, because to-night the congregation will be anxious to be home again."

Mark retired to his own room and read through the sermon once more. It seemed more jejune than ever, and with a sigh of contempt he thrust it into the pocket of his overcoat. As he was turning the handle of the front door to go out, Mrs. Middleditch appeared portentously in the hall.

"Your Christmas dinner will be ready at half-past seven sharp, Mr. Lidderdale. And I'd be obliged if you'd see to it that the Vicar doesn't stay talking in the vestry after the service."

"You're not coming to church, Mrs. Middleditch?"

"No, indeed and I'm not. I'd like to know what kind of a Christmas dinner you'd have if Caroline and me was to spend half the evening in church."

Mark passed out into the raw December night, full of gratitude that whatever else overtook him in the pulpit he should not be paralysed by the vision of Mrs. Middleditch gazing up at him in critical disapprobation, nor hear her dry insistent cough reminding him, like the ticking of a large unwieldy clock, of time's flight.

The congregation, as the Vicar had predicted, was small; but the very smallness of it affected Mark more than if the church had been full. He felt like a man who will be called upon to make a speech at a very small and select dinner-party, at which he must presume that the guests are likely to be more severe judges of convivial oratory than a large, mixed gathering. These people who had left their crackers and their paper caps, their glittering presents and their cheerful firesides to brave this raw December night and come to church were the religious experts of Galton. Convention would have allowed them to stay at home this evening. That they had not stayed at home suggested that they were peculiarly aware of something beyond the mere sociable exterior of Christmas.

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No doubt the mince-pies they had eaten and the port they had drunk would incline them to be tolerant, but the Vicar, by introducing the cope, might strain their forbearance and possibly revive their critical faculties. They might expect from the sermon some kind of compensation for the shock the cope would have given them. Moreover, they would certainly be anxious to record their verdict upon the new curate. They would enjoy the power of being able to praise or damn his preaching to those who had not left their crackers and their paper caps. It had been all very well in argument with the young men at Silchester Theological College to scoff at sermons and to be witty at the expense of those who worshipped the spoken word in preference to Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament; but here and now it was seeming imperative to make a good impression with his preaching. His visiting, his Sunday School teaching, his way of reading Morning and Evening Prayer, his assistance at Mothers' Meetings, his skill at bagatelle in the Lads' Club were all going to be judged by his performance in the pulpit. Let him only preach well, and all his shortcomings as a curate would be forgiven. Let his preaching be a fiasco, and he himself should be a fiasco. It was strange that the Vicar should not have grasped the importance of the occasion and taken more interest in the sermon his curate proposed to deliver. It showed a lack of imagination. It was no excuse to say that he was nervous about the effect of his cope on the parish. For ten years he had been introducing novelties one at a time with excessive caution. He ought to know by now that until it came to incense, to which English people often possessed a physical as well as a moral and religious repugnance, one could introduce anything. The mistake of priests like Shuter was letting their parishioners see that they were afraid of them. Besides, it was a waste of spiritual energy to prepare people so arduously for albs and amices. It was no wonder that Catholics were often accused of supposing that ritual was more important than anything else. It was their own self-consciousness that was at fault.

These were the kind of thoughts that were chasing

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each other round in Mark's brain while the Psalms were being sung and the prayers were being said. He tried to shut them out and concentrate all his attention on the service; but he could not succeed. Even when he was reading the lessons his mind wandered, so that he stumbled over the simplest words. At last the fatal hymn that marked the imminent approach of his sermon began :

*While shepherds watch'd their flocks by night,
All seated on the ground,
The Angel of the Lord came down,
And glory shone around.*

Five more verses ! And how gleefully and rapidly the congregation was singing !

*' Fear not,' said he; for mighty dread
Had seized their troubled mind;
' Glad tidings of great joy I bring
To you and all mankind.'*

Would it not be prudent to leave his stall at the end of the next verse ?

*' To you in David's town this day
Is born of David's line
A Saviour, Who is Christ the Lord;
And this shall be the sign: '*

Mark had paced in fancy the distance from his stall to the pulpit during this last verse, and had decided to wait for one more.

*' The heavenly Babe you there shall find
To human view display'd,
All meanly wrapped in swathing bands,
And in a manger laid.'*

Mark, with desiccated lips and sandy tongue, left his stall and descended the chancel steps.

*Thus spake the seraph; and forthwith
Appear'd a shining throng
Of Angels praising God, who thus
Address'd their joyful song:*

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Mark was amazed at the fortissimo of the last verse and began to count the congregation. There were certainly many more people in church this evening than he had supposed until he surveyed them from this elevation.

*' All glory be to God on high,
And to the earth be peace;
Good will henceforth from heav'n to men
Begin and never cease.' Amen.*

The congregation settled down in their seats with much coughing and rustling and flapping of hymn books and arranging of legs, while Mark plunged his hand into the pocket of his cassock and realized with a dizzy horror that somehow or other the manuscript of his sermon was not there. If the pulpit had been a little higher, he might have flung himself over the rail in a desperate attempt to drown himself in that sea of white, upturned faces below. How could he have been such a careless imbecile as to mislay his manuscript? He felt again in his pocket and patted himself to see if the roll of quarto sheets was anywhere about his person. But it was not. It had vanished. He must have dropped it in the vestry. Should he descend from the pulpit and fetch it? But what would the people think? They would suppose that he had been seized with a sudden faintness, and when he came back they would stare at him more fixedly than they were staring now.

"In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

Who was invoking the Trinity? Was this his own voice? Ought he to have put on the stole that was hanging on the rails of the pulpit? Or was that only used by a priest when he was preaching? Everything was deserting him. He would have felt as much at ease in a mosque. Had he even given the invocation correctly?

"The fourteenth verse of the Gospel according to St. John. . . ."

What was he saying? "The fourteenth verse of the first chapter of the Holy Gospel according to St. John : *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.*"

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"This simple statement of the most sublime fact in the history of humanity is the reason that we are gathered together here this evening, and I want you . . . I want you to . . ."

In desperation Mark had plunged into the opening sentence of his written sermon, and he had reached thus far when his memory failed him. It was the most appalling moment of his life. The pale, upturned features of his listeners faded out into a blackness that surged up from below, and rained upon him from above, and swept round him on every side, a blackness like that which may overwhelm a drowning man in the last moment of his consciousness. Mark did actually feel that he was being suffocated, and the silence of the waiting congregation roared in his ears like a flood of waters. Into this blackness, now streaked with flashes of vivid red, he reached out for the words that eluded him. His heart beat with such violence that, when he fought his way up and out from the great whirlpool and beheld again the pale, upturned features of his listeners flickering in the homely gaslight, he was astonished that their hands were not stretched out to succour him. His heart beat more normally. The hammers in his brain were still. The stilted sentences of his written sermon seemed no longer worth the agony of descending that abyss of surge to rescue. He felt grateful to those flickering shapes of human beings below, and he was filled with a desire to talk to them simply for just as long as he felt they were listening to him.

"We are apt at these seasons of great rejoicing to forget why we feel glad. Far be it from me to criticize what is called the Christmas spirit, my dear people, but in our anxiety to exalt this day of good will we are all of us inclined to congratulate ourselves upon our own friendliness and to forget to what we owe our capacity to experience this sense of universal fellowship. Why, I have even heard it said that we owe Christmas to Charles Dickens. Charles Dickens was a very great writer, and Charles Dickens had an immense sympathy with the joys and sorrows of human

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nature; but Charles Dickens was not crucified for mankind. Will you when next you read *The Christmas Carol* or, looking at Christmas from another angle, the account in *Pickwick Papers* of Christmas at Dingley Dell, will you try to imagine Dickens writing the most comic or the most pathetic of his pages about Christmas, unless Almighty God had given us that first Christmas Day nineteen hundred years ago. Wise and learned men will tell you that our Christmas is nothing more than an adaptation of the old Roman Saturnalia. They seem to think that in discovering this they have convicted the Church of a kind of fraud. But if the Church did make use of the habit of pagan merry-making she has no reason to be ashamed of it. Civilization is the direction of human energy toward a good end. The Church might retort upon these wise and learned critics by saying that Almighty God in choosing to be incarnate at this date was hallowing the traditional merrymaking of this gracious time. When steam was applied to the service of man, it was not less wonderful because steam had existed wherever water was being boiled. As a matter of fact, our modern celebration of Christmas is an amalgamation of three feasts, the feast of St. Nicholas or Santa Claus on December the sixth, Christmas itself, and Epiphany or Twelfth Night, which was the original day for giving presents. All our foolish little paper-knives and pin-cushions have their origin in the gold and myrrh and frankincense that the three wise men brought to that lowly stable in Bethlehem. You must remember that our Christmas is essentially a northern Christmas, and that our method of celebrating Christmas owes much of its human geniality to the warm fireside and to the sense of our friends and relations gathered together round that fireside to renew old associations and early affections that would otherwise be completely forgotten. Many of you in church to-night have left such family reunions, and many of you, when you go back home, will continue these celebrations. What brought you out on this cold, wet, and most unpleasant evening? No doubt, Uncle Dick or Uncle Harry felt quite hurt

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that, when he was only back at home for a couple of evenings, you should leave him to digest his mince-pies alone and sally out to church. What brought you here? I do hope that you did not come because it was the correct thing to do, dear people. I am sure you did not come to show off your hats and clothes, because such a wet and stormy night is by no means good for new hats and special clothes. I hope you did not come merely to please the Vicar, although, mind you, I am not saying that you ought not to be very anxious to please the Vicar. But I should prefer to think that you came here to-night in the same spirit as the shepherds when they said one to another, '*Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.*'

"You may not have seen a multitude of the heavenly host filling our dreary Hampshire sky, and praising God, and saying, '*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*' Such a manifestation of Divine condescension could only be expected on that unique night when the Word was made flesh and came to dwell among us. Yet, since that first Christmas, how many thousands and thousands of humble folk have heard those angels in their own hearts and gone to seek that Divine Babe and found Him. You may know that in many churches there is a custom of singing what is called the midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. Unfortunately we lost that beautiful custom under the prosaic and utilitarian dominion of Protestantism, and only now in England are we beginning to get it back. Alas! the watchnight service on New Year's Eve is much more generally popular. What a foolish thing to worship! The first day of a new year! Could any object of celebration be less inspiring? And of all days in the year to choose the first of January! There might be some excuse for worshipping the twenty-first of June. But though Protestant destructiveness has robbed us of the habit of worshipping the Holy Child at midnight Mass, nevertheless you have come with haste like the shep-

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herds to worship Him as soon as you could, and you may be sure that, however merry your Christmas, it will be that much the merrier because you have.

"Dear people, have you ever thought of the pathos hidden behind that Christmas merriment? '*Peace, good will toward men.*' There is no shadow yet. The Blessed Mother holds to her breast that Holy Babe. She has not yet trembled to hear the words of old Simeon: '*Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also.*' Not yet, when the Holy Babe smiles back at her, does she remember the words of the Prophet: '*He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.*' You will hear a great deal of talk about the failure of Christianity; but where in the Holy Gospels and among the Prophets do you find any suggestion that Christianity is to be an easy triumph? When God was made man to redeem us from the sin of Adam, and when by His perfect manhood God showed us how perfect man could be, God suffered and was buried. He suffered. Remember that to-night in the middle of your merrymaking. Listen to the good tidings of great joy. Rejoice because unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. But remember what lies before this Saviour. Only three days hence we shall be celebrating the Feast of the Holy Innocents, those Innocents that were massacred to save the life of the Infant Redeemer so that He might grow to man's estate and Himself suffer infinitely more than the Innocents and die both for them and for you. To-morrow is the Feast of Stephen. Do you remember how the Jews mocked him and cried '*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,*' when they stoned him? Were they not boasting already of the failure of Christianity, and did not Stephen by his last prayer prove once and for all that Christianity was not a failure? '*Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.*' If Christianity had produced nothing more than that one prayer of the first Christian martyr, it could not be called a failure.

"But to-night the Holy Child smiles. To-night the heavenly host rejoices. To-night the Blessed Mother

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is happy with her Divine Babe. Therefore to-night let us smile and rejoice and make merry. But let us try to prolong this Christmas feeling of good will. If we can show good will one day, we can show it every day. If, instead of stupid little paper-knives and pen-wipers once a year, we could give every day Christmas presents of kind thoughts, kind words, kind actions to our fellow-men, should we not every day have before our eyes the vision of the Divine Babe? But alas! Christmas goes by, and we return to our old evil courses. Instead of the laughing Child we see the Man of Sorrows, and even Him we despise and reject, as when He came down to earth He was despised and rejected. But does He love us less dearly for that? Is He less patient, less forgiving? No, no. Every day on countless altars He is offered up for us in the Holy Sacrifice of the . . . in the Holy Sacrifice. Every day, if you will, He is yours in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. That Divine Babe in the manger of Bethlehem, that Man of Sorrows nailed to the Cross, that Risen Christ Who offers us Eternal Life.

"In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Amen."

Mark stumbled down the pulpit steps in a dream, while the congregation rose and bellowed :

*Hark! the herald angels sing
Glory to the new-born King.*

And above the voices and above the organ sounded the chinking of the offertory bags.

When he was back in his stall, Mark looked across at the Vicar for a sign that his first sermon was approved. But the Vicar was intent upon the hymn. He was not a musical man, and this tune was the only one in the hymnal to which he could approximate his voice, so that he sang it with considerably more zest than he sang anything else in the course of the ecclesiastical year. Nor did he make any observations to Mark on their way back to the Vicarage. He did not even talk about the cope

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He seemed in a more than usually depressed state of mind.

Mrs. Middleditch had decorated the dining-room with several sprigs of holly, and either she or Caroline (no doubt it was Caroline) had tied a bunch of mistletoe to the lamp in the hall. It was evidently to be a ceremonious occasion, for when Mark reached his bedroom he found his dress clothes put out for him. Moreover, Mrs. Middleditch, when she had seen them arrive back from service, had actually smiled, so benignly, indeed, that Mark would have embraced her under the mistletoe if the Vicar had not been standing by.

Caroline was even more impetuously benevolent than usual, and what is more she had a bottle of champagne with which to rush round the table instead of bottles of Worcester sauce or mixed pickles. She watched their two glasses as a cat watches a mouse, and the moment either Mark or the Vicar had taken a sip she pounced across the room to fill the glasses up again. She seemed distressed that neither of them could manage to eat proportionately as much of the turkey as they would have eaten of a chicken, and in her anxiety to serve the plum-pudding before the brandy burnt out she upset some of it on the tablecloth. When she tried to blow this out, she only tilted several spoonfuls of flaming brandy into the Vicar's lap.

"Oh, well, Christmas comes but once a year, they say," she exclaimed, putting down the pudding dish and kneeling on the floor to rub the Vicar's leg with a napkin as hard as she knew how.

At last, when she could offer them nothing more, she set down the decanter of port, which had been obtained late on Christmas Eve at the grocer's, a small box of crackers, and a dish of almonds and raisins, after which she hurried away to join Mrs. Middleditch, pausing in the doorway to utter a last injunction that if they wanted anything they were to be sure and ring, because she was that excited that she didn't know if she mightn't have forgotten something.

"Crackers?" the Vicar murmured in embarrassed tones. "Well, I suppose Mrs. Middleditch will be

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offended if we don't pull one of them. Will you—er—pull a cracker with me, Lidderdale? "

"Rather! "

The result of the first cracker was a blue and yellow fool's cap, which Mark instantly clapped on his head.

"I don't think you'd better wear it, Lidderdale," the Vicar said. "And I think we'll send the rest of the box down to the kitchen."

The sight of his curate in that blue and yellow fool's cap may have reminded Mr. Shuter of the subject of vestments, for he went on to say how much gratified he had been at not hearing a single adverse comment on the new cope.

"To be sure, neither of the churchwardens was in church," he added. "Jayne wrote and told me that he would be having a party at his house, and Mr. Richbell has taken Mrs. Richbell to Brighton. She was terribly run down, poor woman. But I always hope that both Dr. Jayne and Mr. Richbell are inclined to exaggerate the hostility to vestments. I certainly did not hear one adverse comment. I really begin to believe that we might introduce vestments at the midday Eucharist next Easter without a great deal of opposition."

Mark wondered if the moment had arrived when he might venture to ask the Vicar's opinion of his sermon; but almost immediately the Vicar himself broached the subject.

"By the way, Lidderdale, I'm afraid I must ask you not to speak of Mass in the pulpit. I've always made a point of not frightening people unnecessarily. I find that nobody ever objects to Eucharist, but a lot of people shudder at Mass."

"They don't shudder at Christmas," Mark said. "Or Michaelmas, or Lammas, or even Candlemas."

"Well, I'm sorry," said the Vicar, "but I've made it a rule never to allude to the Eucharist as Mass, and I must request you not to use the word in public. In fact, to avoid a slip of the tongue, it would be as well not to use it even in private."

"Was the sermon all right otherwise? "

"Oh, yes, I think so. You spoke very clearly. I

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don't think that it's altogether advisable to mention Dickens in a sermon. In an old-fashioned place like this some people might be offended at mentioning a novelist in church. It would be different in London. I do want you to remember that you're not in London. And perhaps it would have been as well to omit all that about the Saturnalia. That sort of thing is a bit above the heads of our people. It's not a very serious matter, but in general I should avoid any reference in the pulpit to a pagan festival."

Mark related his mishap with the manuscript and apologized for his extempore sermon.

"On the whole," the Vicar said, "I think that I prefer extempore preaching. But one must be particularly careful about one's allusions. I don't think that it was wise to talk of the Hampshire sky as dreary. Local patriotism is very strong in Galton. But as long as you keep a command upon your tongue, I see no harm—indeed, I see much good in your preaching extempore. Will you have any more almonds or raisins?"

One of the Vicar's unfortunate habits was not smoking, or, perhaps what was worse, of occasionally smoking a cigarette as gingerly as though it had been the fuse of a bomb. It would be impossible for Mark to enjoy the cigar that one of the parishioners had pressed upon him as something special, and after fingering for a while the silver paper in which it was wrapped he put it back in his pocket and lighted a cigarette instead, which from his point of view was really not smoking at all. He wondered how long he ought to keep the Vicar company and if he should be invited to spend the rest of this dreary evening in his study, and if he were invited to do so what he should find to talk about. He wished that his Vicar would not assume so much formality in order to conceal his shyness. Unless they could establish some kind of personal relation between one another, how were they ever going to maintain any kind of personal relation between themselves and their parishioners? Here they were sitting opposite to one another on Christmas night, each of them smoking a cigarette he was not enjoying, separated one from the

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other by an abyss of temperamental difference and yet by their vocation bound to serve God and man in the same way. Perhaps the barrier of the Vicar's shyness would gradually be broken down. But when? Luckily, Mark thought, he should have a good deal of reading to get through for his priest's examination, and there would not be many such evenings when this convention of good feeling and good fellowship was going to be imposed on them both.

"We shall have to invite Mrs. Middleditch and Caroline to come and pull crackers with us," Mark suggested at last in desperation.

The Vicar blinked and tugged at his beard.

"Oh, do you think they would enjoy pulling crackers? I always think that they prefer to be left to themselves. Don't forget, Lidderdale, that we have a quantity of parish entertainments before us next week. The Christmas tree that Mrs. Hunter-Galloway has generously given us. Then there's the Mothers' Tea on Tuesday, and on Wednesday we have the Young People's Ball, and on Thursday the Old Folks' At Home. And what is there on Friday? Oh, no, I remember. I said that there would be nothing on Friday. But on Saturday Colonel Bellingham is going to address the lads of the Brigade and present them with six drums subscribed for by the parish. He is most kindly presenting the fifes himself. No, I think we'd better leave Mrs. Middleditch and Caroline to their own devices this evening; but if you'll kindly ring the bell we can send down the almonds and raisins. You're still wearing that blue and yellow cap, Lidderdale. You'd better remove it before Caroline comes in. I'll tell her to take the box of crackers downstairs as well."

Mark went up to bed that night feeling as hostile to Christmas as King Herod himself.

CHAPTER IV

VISITING

MARK rose in the morning with a firm resolution not to rebel against anything that happened or did not happen in the parish of St. Luke's, Galton, during the year of his diaconate.

"And the first martyr of all was a deacon," he thought, smiling.

Mark found that by suppressing all criticism direct or implied, by attending to his parish duties without making himself too prominent by his enthusiasm or his originality, by preaching sermons of the most perfect banality, by visiting assiduously every afternoon, and by making a fetish of punctuality he could acquit himself satisfactorily in the eyes of the parochial world, while the time he had a right to claim for private reading allowed him a measure of life in the seclusion of his own room. During that first month the most exciting events were the Vicar's sudden expansiveness in relating his story of Mrs. Middleditch and Caroline's abrupt request to be called Carrie. Mark dined with the Towers at the Rectory, with the Jaynes, and with the Richbells. He went to lunch with Mrs. Hunter-Galloway and to tea with Mrs. Bellingham. He had supper one night with Tom Hartley, the curate of St. Swithun's, and listened with enough apparent interest to a long disquisition on the marvellously straight bat of a Mr. Somebody-or-other who had once played for the county.

After a month of visiting Mark decided that there was not one interesting human creature in the whole parish. Mrs. Smith was exactly like Mrs. Brown, and they were both of them just as much like Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Robinson. Miss Williams was not to be distinguished from Miss White; and when one had chatted with Mr. Thompson,

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one chatted with Mr. Thompson all over again in the shape of Mr. Johnson. Even if the Vicar of St. Luke's had possessed a personality of outstanding strength, Mark was bound to admit that it would not have been of much avail here. And it was not the lethargy of the deep country, if lethargy was the word to use of a town that had doubled its population in twenty years. Nor was it indeed a lethargy. It was rather a profound insensibility, a loss of perception comparable to the blindness of the mole that is always grubbing in the dark. These people were grubbing in the dark for money, and their vision had been slowly atrophied. He asked himself why such insensitive beings should object to vestments at the mid-day Celebration; and he decided that it was for the same reason that Judas objected to that very costly spikenard's being used by Mary to anoint the feet of Christ, because it was a waste of money that might otherwise have been spent upon the poor, or in other words, upon themselves. Caroline's invitation to call her Carrie was the first encouragement Mark had received to suppose that when he put on the clerical black he was not for ever divorced from humanity, and soon after this he asked the Vicar if it might not be a good move for him to get acquainted with Oaktown, of which he had heard a number of remarkable accounts in the parish. He hoped that the Vicar would not offer to show him round. He was in the mood for exploration, and he felt that any chance he might have of getting to know the reputed eccentrics of Oaktown would be destroyed if he were presented to them officially. Luckily a withering east wind decided the Vicar to let Mark go by himself, warning him that he must not expect too much, because only a very few of the Oaktown residents were churchpeople.

"I don't want to discourage you, Lidderdale," he said. "But you must remember that the kind of people who try to gain a livelihood in such a tinpot settlement as Oaktown are likely to be rolling stones. You'll find that they lack the steadiness of character vital to the success of the pioneer. Yes, I'm afraid that most of them are ne'er-do-wells who cannot stick at anything. Major Kettlewell kindly offered me the use of an empty

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barn whenever I wanted to hold a service. But the attendance was bad the first time I went, and even worse the second time, so I told him that I saw no use in neglecting our Sunday school to give a service to people who evidently didn't appreciate what it meant for a priest to have to walk a couple of miles there and a couple of miles back on Sunday afternoon. Of course, now that you've joined me we may be able to arrange something more regular. But you'll find them very difficult. Yes, you take the Chatsea road and turn off to the right by the signpost that says Medworth $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles. I hope you'll have a fairly pleasant walk. The wind is very harsh and bitter, but I suppose that we ought not to expect June in January."

"Whom do you suggest I ought to visit first?" Mark asked.

"Oh, I certainly think it would be advisable to call on Major Kettlewell first. He is the leading inhabitant of the place, if you can call Oaktown a place."

Mark was disappointed. He had not the least desire to spend the afternoon with a leading inhabitant. He had been heavily dosed with leading inhabitants and important parishioners ever since he arrived in Galton.

"And if Major Kettlewell isn't at home?"

"Why, then I think I should visit the Poleys at Fernbank. They did come to church once, and you might ask them why they never came again."

Notwithstanding the wind, Mark enjoyed his walk under an ashen sky through a gently undulating country of bare furrows backed by rolling woods. On leaving the Chatsea road for the Medworth turning he found himself out of the wind between high hazel hedges. He walked on for some time without meeting a soul or perceiving the sign of a human habitation, and he was beginning to think that he must have mistaken his direction, when he was brought to a standstill by the road's suddenly forking. Of the two roads, that on the right hand climbed uphill under a grove of high beech trees, while the one on the left wound on and quickly lost itself to sight between the hazel hedges. Apparently an important residence was close by, for the wooded

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tongue of land that divided the two roads revealed the beginning of a carriage-drive beyond a massive gate of wrought iron slung between two stone pillars, each surmounted by a rusty cannon-ball. Perhaps this was the abode of Major Kettlewell. The Vicar had said that he lived in a wood, and these cannon-balls suggested a naval or a military spirit in the background, unless indeed this was a minor entrance to some ancient park far removed from Oaktown in every way. Mark made up his mind to explore a little way up the drive and try to obtain a notion of his whereabouts. A missel-thrush was singing on the topmost bough of one of the trees that overshadowed this winding drive, and with its reckless song gave romantic expression to the atmosphere of the surroundings. The old-fashioned gateway, with its hint of Marcus Stone elopements, and the mossy drive trodden by the dallying feet of how many lovers in days gone by filled Mark with awe of the past. Had he been a poet he would have started to compose a sonnet. The missel-thrush scattered his notes to the wind like one of the Marcus Stone gamblers who had diced away home and fortune and ridden away to the wars through this ancient gate. Here and there in the shadowy banks a few exceptionally wan primroses would have incited observers to write to the papers about their premature flowering. But presently the romantic drive came to an end in a large untidy field dotted with hen-coops and perforated with wire-netting. There was no sign of the moated Grange. There was no high Hall garden. Above the untidy field there was a square stucco house, and beyond the untidy field there were more untidy fields, in which about a dozen habitations, mostly of corrugated iron, looked like ballast dropped from a passing balloon.

"Well, I've evidently hit Oaktown," Mark said to himself. "I wonder who owns this prosaic conclusion to such a poetic beginning."

He perceived the blackened ruins of a house among the beech trees, from which a procession of people presently emerged, each of them carrying some utensil or piece of furniture toward a large hut built with tarred weather-boards and roofed with tarred and sanded felt.

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The leader of the procession was a plump and venerable old gentleman dressed in a clerical frockcoat. He had a long white beard, and like many old gentlemen with beards considered it unnecessary to wear a tie. He was followed by a large woman with a face like a pig, dressed in a sealskin coat. She was followed by two young men with extremely fair hair, who both resembled pigs more closely than what was obviously their mother. The procession came to an end with a slim, florid young man and a freckled young woman, both of whom had vivid red hair, though the girl's was not so conspicuous as her brother's, because it was tied up with a blue and white bird's-eye handkerchief. At the sight of a stranger the whole family advanced to greet Mark with what was obviously an emotion of lively interest.

"My name's Lidderdale," Mark said, grasping the old gentleman's outstretched hand. "I'm with Mr. Shuter at St. Luke's, Galton."

"We've just had a nasty fire here," the old gentleman explained. "In fact, the foundations are still quite hot to the touch. This is Mrs. Chilcott. This is my eldest son Micha." He presented the older of the two pig-like young men. "This is Rehob." He pointed to the red-headed young man. "This is Hashabiah," indicating the younger of his pig-like sons. "And this is my daughter Zipporah. My name is the Reverend Nehemiah Chilcott, minister of the Church of the Reformed Children of Israel, Highfield Crescent, Westbourne Park."

Mark shook hands with the members of this odd family in turn.

"I'm sorry to hear you've had a fire. Was much damage done?" he inquired sympathetically.

"Two or three years ago," said the old gentleman, "I gave Micha and Rehob the wherewithal to begin life as poultry farmers. And I promised Hashabiah that when the time came he should join them if he wished it. *So the children went in and possessed the land, and Thou,*" he lifted his eyes to heaven. "*Thou subduedst before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gavest them into their hands, with their kings, and*

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the people of the land, that they might do with them as they would. And they took strong cities, and a fat land, and possessed houses full of goods, wells digged, vineyards, and oliveyards, and fruit trees in abundance, so they did eat, and were filled, and became fat, and delighted themselves in Thy great goodness. Nevertheless they were disobedient." Here the old gentleman glared fiercely at his sons. "*And rebelled against Thee, and cast Thy law behind their backs, and slew Thy prophets. . . .*"

"Steady on, father," Rehob interrupted. "We didn't slay anybody. In fact the only thing we did do was drink a couple of bottles of cider apiece every day."

"*They wrought great provocations,*" the old gentleman went on sternly. "You must know, Mr.— I beg your pardon, but your name. . . ."

"Lidderdale."

"Well, Mr. Lidderdale, you must know that, when the children of the Church of the Reformed Children of Israel reach the age of sixteen and are baptized, they are called upon to seal the covenant. I will not detain you now with a list of what that includes, but amongst other things they forswear all strong drink. The Reformed Children of Israel are total abstainers. Unfortunately my own boys, caring nothing about my grey hairs, took to drinking cider, and lo, the Hand of the Lord hath descended upon them."

Mark fancied that he heard Hashabiah mutter something like "Rats!" under his breath; but his father could not have heard it, for he went on more solemnly than ever:

"When the Reformed Children of Israel are called upon to seal the covenant, they also forswear marriage without their parents' consent. But my son Micha engaged himself to a daughter of Ashdod, and my son Rehob proposed to a daughter of Ammon. *And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, 'Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves.'*"

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During this tirade the two offenders had sat down on a log and were shaking their heads at one another, as if to wonder what the old fool would say next.

Mrs. Chilcott had withdrawn herself from the conversation and was calmly polishing a scorched kettle with the sleeve of her sealskin coat, while Zipporah had wandered off to feed the fowls.

"The long and the short of it is," the old gentleman continued, "that a provoked, a mighty, and a terrible God has burnt them out of the house which they have builded with their hands, so that until they can rebuild it with their hands they will have to abide in the cowshed, and I do not think," he concluded triumphantly, "that either the daughters of Ashdod or the daughters of Ammon will care to abide in a cowshed."

Mark felt that this was not the moment to intrude longer upon a family torn by internal dissension. So, having inquired the way to Major Kettlewell's house, he promised to call again when they were not so busy and left them to continue their work of salvage.

Major Kettlewell lived in the largest of the few brick houses in Oaktown, and this gave him, at any rate in his own eyes, the right to be considered the chief inhabitant, apart from his rank, which some people did not admit to be genuine, inasmuch as he had only been a major in the volunteers. Like the Chilcotts he confronted the world with a grandiose gate, and his drive was longer and more serpentine than theirs. His house occupied the middle of a moderately large coppice, and in his anxiety for seclusion the Major had only cut down just enough trees to clear a space for his house, which languished in a privacy of eternal shade.

The first thing that caught Mark's eye along the drive was a large yellow notice-board on which was painted in scarlet letters *BEWARE OF DANGEROUS EXPLOSIVES*. He looked round for the powder magazine that was presumably near at hand, but could not see the vestige of a building. He was expecting every moment to hear the sound of blasting, when he saw another notice *BEWARE OF THE BULL*. This was more disturbing, and he hurried past, to read about

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twenty yards farther along *BEWARE OF SAVAGE DOGS*. On the whole, Mark decided that he was unlikely to come to any more harm by advancing than by retreating. So he penetrated deeper into the coppice without seeing or hearing anything more lively than a pair of squirrels. He had just caught sight of chimneys and a red-tiled roof among the trees, when he heard a blustering voice shout from the covert :

"What the devil are you doing in here? I've given fair warning that I shall shoot all trespassers at sight in future. Go back the way you came. Go back at once. Don't try to argue with me, you ruffian. I won't be argued with. Rover! Lion! Turk! At him, good dogs! Seize him! Shake him!"

Mark grasped his walking-stick and prepared to defend himself, but no dogs were to be heard or seen. At last an extremely tall and veiny-faced man with a bottle nose and a turkey's neck emerged from the trees, a boy's air-gun under his arm.

"You're trespassing! You're trespassing," he shouted. "Go back at once, or I'll put a bullet through you."

"But I've come to call on you," Mark protested. "That is, if you are Major Kettlewell."

"That's my name. I beg your pardon. I thought you were a trespasser. I'm pestered with them here. I simply cannot keep them out. They treat my grounds like a public park. It's damnable. I beg your pardon. I see you're a clergyman."

Mark explained who he was.

"Come in and have a cup of tea. Sorry to receive you like that, but I've had the very deuce of a time lately. By Jove, it's lucky for you I didn't shoot at sight. I've sworn I would, and I shall do it one of these days."

"What about the dogs?" Mark inquired. "Are they chained up?"

"There aren't any dogs here," said the Major. "Not even a Pekinese. That's my trouble. My wife doesn't like dogs. So I have to pretend I keep them. Otherwise I should have even more trespassers than I have already."

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Look here, it's rather early for tea, isn't it? It's only half-past two. I didn't think of that when I suggested tea. So you're the new curate? I hope you'll come and give us a service occasionally. We're scandalously neglected here by everybody. The people of Galton simply cannot get into their heads that we're a proper village. A real community, don't you know. They ought to make me a magistrate. But they won't. It's abominable. Look here, come into my den."

The Major led the way into the house.

"I expect my wife's lying down, so we mustn't talk too loud, if you don't mind." He opened the door of a tiny room at the end of the hall. "I call this my den. I smoke in here, you know, and all that sort of thing. My wife objects to smoking about the house. She's very old-fashioned. Good thing too! I always say that. The women nowadays are impossible. It's a relief to come across a woman who is a woman. You know. My wife's a thorough woman. A womanly woman! She hates the people round here. Despises them. She's intellectual, but, by Jove, she never forgets that she's a woman."

Mark inquired about the Chilcotts.

"Oh, ranters. Frightful, horrible ranters. Little Bethel and all that sort of thing. They had a fire yesterday. Burned the whole damned house to bits. Serve 'em right. They built it themselves. Cheap. Very cheap."

"Their gate is impressive," Mark said.

"They bought that at a sale. Always buying things at sales. Quite impossible people. Ignorant and argumentative. They're poultry farming. No money in it, of course. I'm sorry my wife is lying down. I don't like to wake her up. She gets palpitations if she's woken up. You know, she palpitates. It's an infernal business."

"Don't the explosives worry her?" Mark asked.

"Oh, there aren't really any explosives. But I have to do something in self-defence. Of course, if I were a magistrate I should put the whole neighbourhood in jail and stop this infernal trespassing. Melville the Squire is hopeless. He's nothing but a rank snob. I called on

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him when we first came here, but he's never so much as left a card on me."

Mark told the Major that he had not yet had an opportunity of making the acquaintance of any of the county potentates.

"Take my advice and keep away from them," the Major snapped "Don't let yourself be patronized by a set of stuck-up snobs without as much brains among the lot as a puff-ball. They despise Oaktown. A set of mugwumps, that's what they are. But we shall show them that Oaktown stands for more than they realize. By gad, it's enough to make a fellow turn Radical. I'm not too proud to pass the time of day with my humbler neighbours, just because I have a brick house. I don't give myself airs and sneer at corrugated iron. I'm not ashamed of Oaktown. I've been trying ever since I lived here to get the place recognized by the post office. I was on the point of getting Oaktown approved as the official name, when a fellow called Waterall, a wretched week-ender, tried to get it called Oak, and, what's more, persuaded half the feeble idiots in the place to support him. What is the result? We're still officially known as the Oak Farm Estate. That's a nice address. Instead of Oaktown, Hants, as a telegraphic address we have to put Oak Farm Estate, Galton, Hants, because there's another Galton in Worcestershire. That means three-halfpence extra on every telegram my friends send me. That's bad enough, but what's worse is that I have to pay sixpence portorage on every telegram I receive from them, and have to put up with a telegraph-boy whistling *Sweet Rosy O'Grady* up and down my drive."

The Major's indignation grew louder with every fresh insult offered to Oaktown, and Mark thought that he was going to fall into an apoplexy, when much to his relief a feminine voice calling from upstairs instantly calmed him, almost, one might have said, frightened him into silence.

"I expect she's heard your voice," the Major had the effrontery to tell his visitor. Then, pitching his cigar into the grate, he hurried out of his den to appease her.

"It's the new curate from St. Luke's, my dear,"

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Mark heard him say. "I'm so sorry he woke you up. Won't you come down now? We'll wait for you in the drawing-room. Mr. Lidderdale was smoking, my love. I think that must be what you smelt. I'm sure it wasn't the bonfire. I had it put out the moment you objected to the fumes. I assure you, my dear, several buckets of water were flung over it. I'm convinced that what you smelt was our guest's cigar."

The colloquy outside was lowered to a whisper, and presently the Major returned to invite Mark into the drawing-room, there to await the advent of Mrs. Kettlewell.

"You've finished your cigar, haven't you? They're not at all bad, are they? There's a little man in the Haymarket who gets them for me specially. You'd be surprised if you heard what I pay for those cigars. They're really too ridiculously cheap."

"Are they indeed?" said Mark, who had been wondering for some time how to get rid of his without offending his host.

"I'll give you his address if you like."

"Thanks very much."

"Only keep it dark. I don't want the police to get on his track."

"Why, is he an anarchist or something?" Mark asked.

"No, no, no. But hush, mum's the word! The tobacco is grown in England. That's why they're so cheap."

"But why should the police bother about them?" Mark laughed. "They're not really dangerous explosives."

"They've not paid duty," said the Major, looking very wicked indeed.

Mark felt a most desperate character when he followed him into the drawing-room, which was full of all the ugly things that travellers collect, assegais and porcelain German pipes and framed photographs of Niagara.

"An old campaigner like myself gets together a lot of stuff," said the Major complacently. "Any time when you've nothing better to do I'll show you all my curios."

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I've got a heap of interesting odds and ends of one kind and another, including the dried heads of two Andaman Islanders. Not so big as oranges. Most extraordinary. But here comes Mrs. Kettlewell."

Mrs. Kettlewell was not as imposing as Mark had expected. Her principal feature was not her own, but a wig as dark and curly and pinguid as Perique tobacco. Really she struck Mark as being full of geniality, but he supposed that, like her hair, it was assumed for visitors.

"I'm so very distressed that I wasn't down to greet you, Mr. Lidderdale. But my doctor has given me strict orders to lie down every afternoon after lunch. I'm a positive martyr to bad health. Am I not, Wilberforce?"

"She is indeed, Mr. Lidderdale. That was our chief reason for retiring into the country."

"I'm afraid I find the country somewhat dull," Mrs. Kettlewell said unkindly. "I was always used to such a gay society. The Major and I had so many intellectual friends. There was one gentleman who wrote a guide book to Dartmoor which was published, and he most kindly sent me an autographed copy. But here one never meets anybody at all interesting, unless, of course," she added quickly, "somebody like yourself calls unexpectedly. I only wish I could get in to church sometimes, but I'm so afraid of the walk back. I could manage the walk in, but the walk back after the service would be too much for me."

"I hope that now I've come the Vicar will be able to arrange for a service to be held here sometimes," Mark said.

"I'm sure Major Kettlewell will lend you his barn," said Mrs. Kettlewell. "I'm sure you'd lend the Vicar your barn again, wouldn't you, Wilberforce?"

"With pleasure," the Major assented. "But, mind you, we're staunch Protestants in Oaktown. I hear that Mr. Shuter has been exceeding the speed limit lately. This High Church business is never going to take in England, Mr. Lidderdale." The Major spoke as if it were a vaccine. "There's a fellow who lives in a small village beyond Medworth. Would you believe it? Last Easter he actually rode into his church on a donkey, yes,

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and what's more, rode all round it, while the congregation sang that hymn—what's it called?"

"I'm afraid somebody has been making a donkey of you, Major Kettlewell," Mark said impatiently. "But I can promise you that neither Mr. Shuter nor I will ride round your barn on a donkey."

"There you are, Wilberforce," his wife exclaimed, shaking her head in roguish reproach. "I was sure that story about Green Lanes was exaggerated."

"Well, I'm not at all so sure," the Major obstinately maintained. "However, I hope we shall get a nice simple Evangelical service if I lend my barn. I don't pretend to be a deeply religious man, Mr. Lidderdale. I suppose I've seen too much of the world. No, I don't pretend to be very religious, but when I go to church I like a simple service. I don't care to see a lot of bowing and scraping all over the place. You may think me old-fashioned, and I dare say I am, but that was the way I was brought up by my dear old mother. And she was a woman who knew her Bible backwards. She *was* a religious woman, if you like. Why, she hated the Pope as much as she hated the devil. And she wasn't narrow-minded either. Oh, no, we children were allowed to play croquet on Sunday and read anything we liked in reason. Not novels, of course. And I don't read novels now, what's more. I'm usually a bit tired in the evening; but if I do pick up a book I want to feel that it makes some demand on my brain. The last book I read was a history book, *Charles II and His Court*. It was most instructive. Now Mrs. Kettlewell is a bit inclined to be High Church, aren't you, my dear?"

"Well, I'm bound to say I do like a service to be bright and cheerful," Mrs. Kettlewell admitted. "And I dare say Mr. Lidderdale agrees with me."

"I'm afraid I must be getting away now," Mark said abruptly.

Mark did not feel that he could stand much more of this silly talk without testifying against his hosts, and what a waste of time that would be, for they would never grasp what an enormity their mere existence was. He was thankful when the gate of Major Kettlewell's drive

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swung to behind him. What was one to do with people like that? How was one to pierce such hidebound complacency? It was invulnerable except to the Grace of God. That was the only thing to say. It was not astonishing that critics of the Christian faith should use the Kettlewells of this world as examples of its profound futility. People like old Nehemiah Chilcott might be wrong-headed, even mad, but at any rate they had received from religion a positive energy. One was conscious of a living force when one listened to the Chilcotts. But how could God allow such drearily negative creatures (and even to call them negative allowed them to be more than they were) as the Kettlewells to pretend to the corporeal evolution of humanity and be content with the stomachic intelligence of sponges and jelly-fish? And there were millions of Kettlewells. There had been millions, and there would be millions more. Millions of individual Kettlewells, each with his own soul to save or damn! St. Anthony of Padua was more profitably employed in preaching to fishes than to the Kettlewells of mediæval Italy. The clearest fire of faith might be damped down by the existence of such people. Mark wished that he had followed his own impulse to avoid this bellwether of the Oaktown flock. If he had stayed and chatted with the minister of the Reformed Children of Israel, no doubt he would soon have been embroiled in an argument; but at any rate he would have been arguing with somebody who held a definite point of view about religion, however extravagant or fantastic. But the Kettlewell fog which obscured all life here or hereafter chilled the soul. Who were the other people the Vicar had suggested he might visit? The Poleys, wasn't it? Mark looked round at the various tin houses that dotted the sloping ground on either side of the road and wondered in which of them the Poleys lived. Presently he met a little girl with a can of milk, and was directed to Fernbank, which was on the road back to Galton.

So far as Mark could see through a narrow slit in the high untrimmed hazel hedge that protected the residence against the inquisitiveness of the outer world, Fernbank consisted of two rooms. The gate was locked

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when he climbed up the steps cut in the bank, for it actually was a bank at any rate, though there were no ferns anywhere to be seen. He rattled this gate for a minute or two without obtaining any acknowledgment from within, and he was just going to turn round and give the visit up, when the door of the cottage opened cautiously and an extremely fat woman, dependent for any recognition as a female shape on the string of the apron tied round her middle, asked in a hoarse whisper what he wanted.

Mark was getting good at explaining himself by now, and the fat woman evidently accepted his story as genuine, for she emerged from the door and came shuffling along the path to unlock the gate. She was wearing a man's cap, which was fastened to her scanty locks by about half a dozen large hat-pins that reminded Mark of the arrows in a St. Sebastian.

"Is Mr. Poley in?"

"I'm Mrs. Poley. Mr. Poley's out. But that doesn't matter. You must excuse my voice. I lost it when Mr. Poley and me lived in Maidstone. I couldn't abide Kent. I'm a Dorset woman myself. Well, Kent robbed me of my voice. There's not a doubt of that."

Mark found himself in a matchboarded room under the eyes of four portraits, in one of which he fancifully traced a resemblance to Mrs. Poley.

"Yes, that's me," she breathed. "It was painted by a travelling artist on the Whit Monday of 1877. The others is Mr. Poley and Mr. Poley's father and mother. We saved them from the wreck."

Mark looked puzzled.

"Now don't tell me that you're the new curate at St. Luke's and haven't heard how Mr. Poley's business as a butcher was wrecked."

Mark declared that he had never heard any allusion to the unhappy event.

"Ah, well," said Mrs. Poley in an injured whisper, "it's been talked over enough in Galton. There's some of them as have had the lying impudence to say as Mr. Poley couldn't manage his business proper. Ignorance. That's what it is. Low, vulgar, common

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ignorance. Hamshire Hogs, and never was a truer word said. Ugh! I hate the whole lot."

"Then why did you come to live in Hampshire?" Mark asked.

"Because we saw it advertised in the paper where we was staying with my sister at Charmouth. Land for the millions sold in lots from a quarter of an acre upwards, and so Mr. Poley and me, with what we'd saved from the wreck, came down here one of the first and had our pick. There was only one quarter of an acre we fancied and we bought it. The next quarter of an acre belonged to a fellow who was going to do no end with the land. Well, all he done was build himself a brick Double U and then go broke. Well, Mr. Poley he was took with this quarter of an acre next ours, and he got it cheap. Well, we built our house from Humphreys' iron buildings up against the fellow's brick Double U who went broke, and Mr. Poley, who's very handy with his hands, turned the Double U into a brewhouse and then erected a tin Double U, which was all we wanted. Only then he went to a sale and saw another tin Double U cheap. So he bought that as well, and now we've got two, which is really more than we want."

"No, we haven't, Maria. We've only got one now, because I've sold it to the Chilcotts, who burnt theirs in the fire. And I sold it for five shillings more than I gave for it at the sale."

The newcomer was a man with greying sandy hair and very long upper lip. He was a type that is common in Ireland, and his merry blue eyes seemed to indicate an Irishman's sense of fun. He was in his shirt sleeves, but was guarded against the January air by a mangy otter skin stole round his neck. He was wearing a sack-cloth apron, and on his head what Mark guessed to be an old straw hat of his wife's. Perhaps the cap she was wearing was the only one he had, which would account for his having to fall back on feminine headgear.

"Hush, William," his wife whispered. "Here's the Reverend Lidderdale come to pay us a visit. And I dare say he'd be glad of a glass of our home-brewed."

William Poley immediately bustled off to the brew-

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house and bustled back with a jug and glasses, into which, with a flourish, he poured a turbid concoction that tasted a good deal more like beer than it looked.

"The water's not right for it," Mr. Poley said, shaking his head. "Well-water drawn up from the chalk is never good for brewing. Now in Maidstone, where we used to live, we brewed a lovely liquor."

"Lovely," Mrs. Poley echoed hoarsely. "But William never took to butchering, and it was so shocking bad for my chest. William, he wanted to be a fishmonger, but his father wouldn't hear of it."

Whenever Mrs. Poley spoke, her husband listened to her with a respectful admiration, turning from time to time to watch how much her discourse was being appreciated, and wagging his head and winking as if he would drive home to Mark what a wonderful woman he had the good fortune to be listening to. Major Kettlewell had loudly proclaimed the quality of his wife; but his praise had been a method of propitiation, for he was afraid of her. Poley, on the other hand, was obviously sincere in the tribute of his admiration.

"Never could take to butchering, somehow," he said to Mark, and then relinquished the narrative to his wife's rich, hoarse eloquence. She talked so incessantly that Mark began to wonder if the air of Kent was as much to be blamed for the hoarseness as her own abuse of her vocal cords. At last when he had an opportunity of interrupting the flow of her conversation, he managed to raise the subject of attending church.

"I'll never put my foot inside of a church again. Not in Hamshire," Mrs. Poley asseverated.

"No, no," her husband supported. "Amshire Ogs they're called, and Amshire Ogs they are. We only went to church once, and that was when we first came here."

"'Let's go to church, William,' I said," Mrs. Poley broke in.

"That's right, Maria. Those were your very words. Yes, Mr. Lidderdale. And Mrs. Poley routed right to the bottom of a trunk and fished out a hat she hadn't worn for twenty years and more."

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"Well, I wanted to show my respects," said Mrs. Poley. "But when Mr. Poley and me walked up the aisle, believe it or not as you please, Mr. Lidderdale, but I give you my solemn word as the whole congregation turned round like a lot of ignorant monkeys and stared at me until I nearly upped and walked straight out again."

"That's the truth, Mr. Lidderdale," her husband continued. "And I actually heard a woman, who may call herself a lady, but nobody else wouldn't call her one, turn round to another woman sitting beside her and say, so as anybody could hear her, 'Goodness, what a hat!' And when I told Mrs. Poley what I'd heard, she took her dying vow she'd never put her foot inside of a church again."

"And I was so flustered with the walk in under the boiling sun. That's what it was. And to be insulted like that by a collection of ignorant monkeys."

"Ogs, my dear, Ogs," her husband broke in. "Don't call 'em monkeys. Oh, Mr. Lidderdale, the Oggishness of Amshire's enough to break anyone's heart. Why, when we first came here there was a scoundrel lived down the road at a place he called Canadian Cottage. Blackham his name was. And he used to send postcards to old Joe Gnathead and me. Poor old Gnathead was a confectioner in Blackheath, and he came here and built Blackheath Villa and worked at his vegetables morning, noon, and night. So this Blackham, when they had an argument, started in sending him postcards addressed, *Joseph Gnathead, Esquire, The Garden of Eden, Oak Farm Estate, Galton, Hants.*"

"But he wrote worse to you, William," Mrs. Poley put in. "Only you wouldn't sile your lips telling the Reverend Lidderdale what he wrote you for an address."

"No," her husband agreed, with perhaps a hint of disappointment in his tone. "No, I wouldn't sile my lips with what he wrote to me. But I got even with him," he went on, brightening up. "What do you think I wrote to him?"

"I can't guess," Mark said.

"Why, I addressed him *Frederick Blackham, Esquire, The Pillbox, Oak Farm Estate, Galton, Hants.*"

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Husband and wife were both so utterly convulsed with laughter that they could say no more for awhile. Mrs. Poley was the first to recover.

"But he was a wicked man. He'd been one of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales's couriers. Or he said he had. But be that as it may, he used to chase his poor wife round the garden in her nightdress. And once he chased her right up to our front door, which was the beginning of our unpleasant feeling. 'Oh, Mrs. Poley,' the pore thing hollered out. 'Here's Fred chasing me with the carving-knife, and whatever shall I do?' 'Get out of bed, William,' I said. That's right, isn't it? Those were my very words, wasn't they?"

William nodded.

"'Get out of bed,' I said, 'and let the pore creature in, or there'll be murder done.' And William, he jumped right out of bed without waiting to put on his slippers or nothing, and let her in. And there she sat just where you're sitting now, shivering and shaking in our kitchen, while Blackham he started in blaring and swearing at her through the keyhole enough to raise the Judgment."

"Amshire Ogs! Amshire Ogs!" Mr. Poley repeated.

"Was this Blackham a native of Hampshire?" Mark asked.

"No, he wasn't what you'd call a native exactly," Poley admitted with reluctance. "But I reckon when he come to live here his Oggishness was worse than what it would have been anywhere else."

"I'm sorry to hear that the people in church upset you, Mrs. Poley," Mark said, to bring back the conversation to his professional duties.

"They mocked me, Mr. Lidderdale, they mocked me before my very nose," she broke in.

"Still," Mark reminded her, "you must remember that our Lord was mocked."

"Well," said Mrs. Poley obstinately, "if He liked to put up with it, that doesn't say other people are going to put up with it. I wouldn't have minded so much if I hadn't routed out this hat which we saved from the wreck so as to dress myself specially to go to church. And then for a brazen-faced hussy to make game of it, and the

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whole ignorant congregation to start turning round as if it was a performing bear instead of a respectable married woman in her Sunday best. No, I'm much obliged to you, Mr. Lidderdale, for your kindness in calling, and whenever you call I'll be glad to see you and offer you a glass of home-brewed. But put my foot in church again? Never! Why, what with the boiling sun and me colouring up so I was all in a presspiration, and Mr. Poley had to lend me his silk handkerchief which he'd never used, only just worn it in his pocket since the day he bought it. It was one of them Banana handkerchiefs, and it was a sin and a shame to wet a lovely bit of silk like that."

Mark saw that it would be hopeless to try to persuade the old people to attend any service at St. Luke's.

"But if I hold a service in Oaktown?" he asked. "You'd help me by coming?"

Mr. and Mrs. Poley looked at one another.

"Well, I suppose Major Kettlewell's barn couldn't properly count as a church," Mrs. Poley decided. "And I wouldn't be going against my dying oath if I was to set my foot in that."

Mark walked back to Galton in the gathering dusk of the winter afternoon, wondering if he could be considered to have fulfilled his duty. What was the result of his labour? A nebulous promise from Major Kettlewell to lend his barn for a service, and a hesitating promise from the Poleys to attend that service if it were ever held. Still, Oaktown was preferable to Galton; and Mark managed to obtain from the Vicar the privilege of being considered responsible for the spiritual welfare of that mushroom. Mark was soon on good terms with all the oddities of the place, liked them sincerely, and was able to believe that they liked him. Every Sunday afternoon he held a service somewhere somehow. Major Kettlewell was always so self-important about lending his barn that Mark hated using it, and at last he managed to get hold of the kiln of some brickworks that had gone smash for the fourth or fifth time. In this impromptu basilica, removed from the intrusion of his Vicar and the conventional parishioners of St. Luke's, he let himself go as a preacher, and won quite a reputation among the oddities

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of Oaktown. He was credited, not altogether wrongly, with having persuaded Lieutenant Green, a retired mariner, who lived with a housekeeper and seven fox-terriers, to give up drink. Alas ! it was not a permanent conversion ; but Mark did keep him from paying his daily visits to the Market Hotel in Galton, from which he had been wont to return to Oaktown at closing-time so drunk, that only by following unsteadily the white forms of his fox-terriers in the dark and leaning heavily upon the arm of Mrs. Rellie, his patient housekeeper, did he succeed in arriving. This was accorded to Mark as a signal triumph. But, as a matter of fact, Mark himself was not at all satisfied with what he had done, because the Lieutenant took to getting twice as drunk every night in his own bungalow, which Mark did not agree with the rest of the community in thinking an improvement. However, Oaktown and the cure of Oaktown gave Mark an interest that Galton itself could not give him, and he devoted all his spare time to making the best of it.

CHAPTER V

GREEN LANES

ONE morning in March the Vicar told his curate that he was afraid he was neglecting Galton for Oaktown.

"Charity begins at home, Lidderdale. I don't want you to set up a parish within a parish. I should be more inclined to echo your enthusiasm if even one of your favourites condescended to attend his parish church for once. I know that it is a long walk, but it is not so far as all that, and you must remember that if you are continually walking over there you are robbing the people here of a good deal of your time. One or two of the parishioners have commented on your passion for Oaktown, and I fancy that you have given a little offence."

Mark could not pretend to himself that the Vicar's criticism was altogether unjustifiable. At the same time, he could not admit, and in fact he did not believe that he was capable of achieving a great deal in Galton itself. So he braced himself for an argument.

"I feel that I am beginning to get a grip of the people out there," he began.

"I should hope so, after the amount of time and trouble you've taken," the Vicar replied. "But I'm surprised that you, who are always inclined to resent my not having a daily Eucharist and who are so insistent upon the Sacraments before anything, I say I am surprised that you do not seem to have succeeded in practising what you preach."

Mark knew that his Vicar had touched the vulnerable spot in his work.

"It may be presumptuous of me, Vicar, but I have thought that I shall be in a better position next year when I am a priest to give practical effect to my teaching."

"It sounds as if you intended to cut yourself off entirely from your duties here next year," the Vicar said

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sharply. "I should not approve of that. It wouldn't be fair to let you go on now under the idea that I should permit anything in the nature of a chapel-of-ease. I should not. I think that the wisest course, in order to show that there is no kind of division in our views, will be for me to take the Sunday afternoon services in Oak-town and for you to look after the Sunday school here."

Mark had been congratulating himself on avoiding the St. Luke's Sunday school. He knew well enough the importance of impressing the children; but he saw no chance of putting any life into St. Luke's Sunday school unless he were prepared to offend all the teachers and create an uncomfortable situation. He was sure that he should have no support from his Vicar in doing that, and without a free hand he made up his mind that any work of his in the Sunday school would be profitless and barren. However, if he rebelled against authority as a deacon of barely three months' standing, where should he end? He decided that his duty was to subordinate his own feelings and to obey without further questioning. He must also watch his innermost thoughts more carefully, because he fancied that at the very back of his mind there was half a hope that the Vicar, after a month's ministration, would have scattered the people of Oaktown into as many eccentric individuals as there were before his curate had begun to give them a common centre in the brick-kiln. He must also deal severely with the temptation to walk through his duties in the Sunday school. He must try to apply fervour to the existing state of affairs. He must try to be keen on the way things were done now. It would do him good, Mark thought, to take a day off from the whole parish. He had been promising himself a visit to Dorward ever since he arrived, and if to-morrow should be a fine day, he really would walk over to Green Lanes.

The morrow turned out to be an exceptionally fine day, and, it being the Feast of the Annunciation, Mark set out immediately after the Vicar had said Mass. He scandalized Mrs. Middleditch by not waiting for breakfast, and even more by what she called 'ferreting out' food from the kitchen with the connivance of Caroline; but he was impenitent, and being by now used to the

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housekeeper's disobliging spirit, laughed heartily at her indignation.

The first part of the walk to Green Lanes was over the familiar ground he covered whenever he visited Oaktown; but where the road forked by the imposing gate of the Chilcotts he now took the right-hand branch up what was called Bent Hill to the high ground above the scattered bungalows of Oaktown. The road was soon out of sight of these and wound on between low, quickset hedges or wooden palings that did not interfere with a wide view of undulating parkland on either side. Mark had carefully studied his route in a large ordnance map that showed the less frequented paths; and when he turned aside from the road he was on, he found to his great pleasure that the name Green Lanes was no misnomer for the village, and that he was actually going to reach it by those grassy highways that exceed in charm and ease of progress all other highways, even those close-cropped rides that run along the upper ridges of the Downs. The hedgerows, wide sprawling hedgerows that gave as much cover to wild life as small coppices, were as yet bare even of the faintest film of green; but the blackthorn was in full bloom, and on the banks primroses and sweet violets abounded. There was a great variety of birds, whose plumage showed up in perfection against the deep purple of the bare hedges. The grass, intensely green and wearing still its winter velvet, deadened the footsteps of the wayfarer so that at every bend he came upon wild things, stoats and weasels, rabbits, shrews, and once a fox whose rich hue Titian might have envied for some Bacchante's hair. It may have been no more than the ordinary wild life of the English countryside, but in these secluded byways it was so well displayed that the most proficient naturalist might have felt that he was crowding into one walk a quite unusual experience of all that could be observed. After a mile or so the green lane crossed a white high road. It was not a main road, but compared with the lanes it seemed so much in the world that Mark paused and looked right and left for a sign of traffic. He did hear the rattle of cartwheels far off, and he hurried over into the continua-

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tion of the green lane beyond that he might not spoil the intimate revelation of wild life by a vision of humanity. He was childishly anxious to boast that he had walked the whole of the six or seven miles between Green Lanes and Oaktown without encountering a soul. The way was narrower now, encroached upon by thickets of broom. He promised himself the joy of coming this way again in summer, when the broom would be flickering with myriads of butterflies above the yellow flowers. The thickets of broom disappeared, and the lane, receiving two tributary lanes from who should say what remote hamlets, widened out with this accession and ran straight as a Roman road for the next mile. There were gates in the hedgerows here and there; high hedgerows these, matted with traveller's joy, and twined about with ropes of honeysuckle already warmly green. Mark paused at every one of these gates and contemplated the meadows to which they gave ingress. It was not model pasture land he saw, for the line of dark woods beyond had thrown out predatory saplings of oak and ash, and the grass was tufted with ragwort and the tall teasle-heads of last year; but Mark was thinking of their patchwork of summer flowers. Poor land it would be called, but with what a gay poverty, as gay as a gipsy's shawl.

The wide green track did come to an end with the next high road that crossed it; the continuation on the other side was metalled for the hundred yards that carried it into the village, though village was too grand a name for Green Lanes. Why, it lacked even a beerhouse. There was a wide village green, in the middle of which a large pond flashed blue with the March sky, and round this green there may have been twenty scattered cottages and a couple of farmhouses. The parsonage was a small thatched cottage, and when Mark looked over its white gate he saw Dorward, in grey flannel trousers and an M.C.C. blazer, lugging a huge boulder across the diminutive front-garden.

"Hallo, Mark! How are you?" Dorward inquired as casually as if he had only seen him yesterday last instead of several years ago. "I'm making a rockery. I've been going in hard for gardening lately. It's

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interesting. Nothing ever grows. It's rather tiring too. Do you know anything about delphiniums? If you do know anything, you might come and mark the best varieties in my catalogue for me. I'm so out of touch with things here. Boxall at Medworth seemed to think that my delphiniums were out of date. Mine look very blue, but I suppose they're bluer nowadays. How's Shuter?"

Mark had been intending to confide in Dorward some of his difficulties, but now that he was with him it seemed absurd to waste the time in discussing parochial problems.

"I hope you've spiked him up since you came to Galton," Dorward went on. "I saw him at a ruridecanal meeting last summer, and I thought he was shockingly frightened of doing anything."

"I never knew you were a great cricketer, Dorward," said Mark, who did not want to talk about his Vicar.

"I'm not."

"Why did you join the M.C.C.?"

"I didn't."

"But you're wearing an M.C.C. blazer."

"An old aunt of mine sent it for our jumble sale. It belonged to an uncle of mine that died. So I bought it in. Do you know the best kind of red-hot pokers?"

"No, I know nothing at all about gardening," Mark said. "Look here, Dorward, are you going to ask me to lunch? Because if you're not, I shall have to go and search for a pub."

"Beautiful lunch. Beautiful lunch. I'll make a salad."

"Have you got any meat or anything?" Mark persisted.

"Beautiful meat. Beautiful meat. Of course. Of course. Of course. Of course," said Dorward. "Mrs. Gladstone!" he shouted at the top of his voice.

"Yes, Father. Where are you, Father? I'm coming, Father," a shrill voice replied.

"Splendid housekeeper," said Dorward. "Very dirty, but excellent cook. Rather unpunctual. I don't expect you'll get anything to eat before half-past three. But I'll make you a salad at once. I've invented a new one."

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Prunes, cold rice pudding, oranges, chives, cheese, bacon, lettuce, and broad beans. Rather more tarragon vinegar than you'd ordinarily use, and rather less mustard. Mrs. Gladstone!" he shouted again. "Why *don't* you come when I call you?"

"Here I am, Father. Yes, Father. What is it you want, Father."

A battered and voluble woman, wearing a skirt with a very long train, a yellow silk blouse, and a tartan overall, came running from the back of the parsonage.

"Mrs. Gladstone, we shall want a delicious lunch for two. Mr. Lidderdale will be here for lunch. So it must be very delicious."

"Good morning, Father," she said to Mark, and by such a salutation took him very much aback. "Shall I send round to the farm to kill a chicken, Father Dorward? I'm sure Father Lidderdale would like a chicken if he has walked far."

"No, no, no, no, Mrs. Gladstone," Dorward said fretfully. "What is the good of sending for a chicken now? We want lunch quickly. I'll make the salad. There's some cold beef, isn't there? And it must be punctual. Punctual and delicious."

"Oh, yes, Father," Mrs. Gladstone assured him, and while she was speaking hairpins kept tinkling down on the garden path from her hair. "But I wish you'd let me send round to kill a chicken. I'm sure you'd like it better than the beef."

"Go and do as you're told," Dorward commanded.

"Yes, Father. Certainly, Father. Shall I help you move that rock, Father? It's too heavy for you. I'm sure Father Lidderdale will agree with me. I know Our Dear Blessed Lord could move mountains, but I wish this rockery had never been born or thought of. I'm sure he'll injure his internal regions, Father Lidderdale. And I don't care if he turns me out to-morrow. I've said it once and I'll say it again."

"Will you go and get the lunch ready, Mrs. Gladstone, and not stand there talking nonsense."

The housekeeper turned and fled in a shower of hairpins.

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"Talkative woman. Dreadfully talkative," Dorward said. "And always late. Late for Mass, late for breakfast, late for lunch, tea, dinner, bed. Talking to herself down in the kitchen till four in the morning sometimes. Pious, but unpractical. Full of faith, but grubby, sloppy. Come in. We might play a game of two-handed bridge while we're waiting for lunch. I suppose you play bridge?"

"Do you remember when I unloaded Cyril Pomeroy on to you?" Mark laughed.

"Dull, dreary boy. What's become of him?"

Mark shook his head.

"I haven't the least idea. Good gracious, Dorward, what are all these candlesticks for?"

Mark had reason to ask, for every room in the little parsonage was apparently chockful of candlesticks of every size and shape and material. There were pewter candlesticks and wooden candlesticks; silver candlesticks and iron candlesticks; bronze candlesticks and brass candlesticks. It was impossible to move for the crowd of them, and there were even two enormous Paschal candlesticks lying along the narrow stairs on either side.

"Flemish," Dorward said, as if that was a sufficient explanation.

"But why such a quantity?" Mark asked.

"I bought them in Flanders last autumn," Dorward said. "I've given away a good many. The parsonage was full of them."

"It's fairly full now," Mark said.

"Yes, it is difficult to move about. Mrs. Gladstone's room is the fullest. She knocks them down like skittles when she's dressing. You might take a couple back with you and give them to Shuter with my compliments. They are all intended for presents. I'd give you a set of six, but I don't suppose you'd care to carry six, unless you could get a lift in a cart. There's a beautiful set of six in ancient lead, repoussé, but they're the heaviest of the lot."

Mark thought that it would be a jolly thing to have some candlesticks for his brick-kiln basilica, an account of which he gave to Dorward.

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"I'll come and say Mass for you," the latter offered.

Mark hesitated. He would have liked nothing better than to assemble his eccentric Oaktown flock for the purpose of hearing Dorward say Mass. But he had scruples about the loyalty of such a proceeding without leave from his Vicar, and he was perfectly sure that his Vicar would never consent to allow Dorward to officiate in his parish in any capacity.

"What about Shuter?" he objected lamely.

"Do him good," said Dorward. "He ought to be committed to something definite. If I said Mass in his parish, he would be hopelessly committed."

"He would," Mark agreed, with a smile. "No, I'm afraid it wouldn't do. It's a pity. But I'd like to accept your offer of the six leaden candlesticks. That is if you can spare them."

"They were bought for presentation to needy missions," said Dorward. "If you invoked Saint Christopher, he might give you strength to carry them yourself."

Lunch was not so long in arriving as Mark had been led to expect. He absolutely declined to play two-handed bridge with his host, in spite of the gift of candlesticks. Nor would he drag boulders about the garden, but insisted on being taken to see the church.

The church of St. James, Green Lanes, was a perfect specimen of late Norman architecture. It was very small, and could scarcely have held a congregation of more than a hundred. The churchyard had never been darkened by yews, and poverty had prevented the fathers and forefathers of the hamlet from erecting pretentious tombs. There were a few wooden crosses, but most of the graves were by now mere grassy mounds; and where the churchyard ended or where the ancient pasture land by which it was surrounded began was scarcely perceptible. The effect upon the observer of this exquisite little edifice, built apparently upon the top of the world, was of an unparagoned lightness and grace. Mark could not think of any other church that expressed so completely the idea of worship. Many ancient churches oppress the individual soul with the accumulated effort of the past. There are

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moments when they are so much haunted by dead humanity that the individual soul, instead of finding in them release from earth and liberty of aspiration toward eternity, is retarded by an elegiac brooding upon mortality.

"This churchyard would not have done for Gray," Mark said. "It would have been no setting for his classic gloating on graves and worms and epitaphs. There are no morbid reflections to be got out of this. What was, what is, and what will be are fused here. This really is consecrated ground."

Mark thought of St. Luke's, Galton, and tried not to envy Dorward when they passed in under the beaked arch of the west door and he saw that the little church was full within of light and silence and the Holy Ghost. Just as the churchyard lacked monuments and tombstones, so within the walls were bare of tablets or cenotaphs with their florid commemoration of dead men's virtues, and neither knights nor dames nor lords nor ladies prayed here in effigy or begged the help of Christian supplications. Even Dorward's ambition to make a church what he called homely had found the simplicity of this church too discouraging. The only image he had set up was a small image of the Queen of Heaven in peach-blow glaze that cast a rosy purple shadow on the plaster behind its pedestal.

"When I first came here," said Dorward, "I rather thought of getting in a good architect to decorate the walls in the old English style. But I think I shall leave them white. The only thing I do want to erect is a grotto."

"A grotto!" Mark repeated in astonishment.

"For St. James, our Patron."

"Oh, no, Dorward. If you want a grotto, why not make it in your garden instead of that rockery?"

"I never thought of that," Dorward replied. "That's a splendid idea of yours, Mark."

"And you could put scallop-shells round your borders."

"And that's a good idea too," said Dorward. "I wonder if the Bishop of Silchester would bless them, so that I could distribute them to the pilgrims."

Mark laughed.

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"Well, I ought to be getting back now," he sighed. "If you're in earnest about the candlesticks, I'll ask one Pluepott to fetch them the next time he drives this way. He often goes as far as Medworth. You ought to come and visit some of the Oaktown oddities with me, but I suppose you're such an oddity yourself that you find other oddities tiresome. Seriously, though, I wish you would come round with me some afternoon."

Mark decided to walk back by the road through Medworth and the whole length of Oaktown instead of indulging himself in the luxury of once more rejoicing in the solitude of the green lanes. Not that the Medworth road was crowded with traffic; but it was a road, and it seemed to bring this remote hamlet into time and space. Otherwise, Mark thought as he walked back, he should have been tempted to suppose that he had been living all this fine spring day in a chapter of Sir Thomas Malory. When he thought of that little church now, it returned to his fancy not so much like a building of stone as a fountain or a gem. Why should it remain in his memory as something so translucent? It was as if he could with his mind's eye pierce through the shell to the inward reality, like one who is granted the assurance of a sacrament's truth. Yes, Dorward was enviable; but he was the very person for Green Lanes. He had in his own heart the very simplicity that little church demanded, and he was rather to be envied the possession of such simplicity than the possession of the church it suited.

Mark walked on through Medworth, the houses and cottages of which clustered round a church and churchyard to lend it an authentically elegiac atmosphere. The village stood on the highest point of the country for many miles, and it was protected by numerous trees, the grandeur and thickness of which was remarkable at such an elevation. Two miles beyond Medworth the road descended rapidly, and the outposts of the Oaktown settlement came into sight. Mark passed a white gate that was painted ELIZABETH PLACE; but the manor that ought to have been built to suit such a name did not yet exist and was never likely to exist, for this early settler

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had long since vanished, leaving nothing but this gate behind him. On the other side of the road a little farther along was a steep slope of thirty acres or more, once reputed to grow the finest barley in Hampshire. What part of it had not been taken up by settlers was now waste land; but here and there long strips had been partially dug and cultivated, and there were about half a dozen tin bungalows.

Several of Mark's prospective converts were to be found in this part of Oaktown, and looking across now to the squalor and untidiness of their dwellings, to the sight of pigstyes put together out of packing-cases, to broken sashlights picked up cheap at sales and intended to ripen cucumbers, to the chickens that roamed everywhere and resembled at that distance a quantity of dirty paper blown about a rubbish heap, to goats and children and beehives and dirty clothes and discarded straw hats, looking across at all these, Mark wondered if the Catholic Faith he hoped with the help of God's grace to give these people would bring them a yard nearer in space or an hour nearer in time to the spaceless, timeless church he had left up there under that westering sun behind him.

In the dirtiest and most disreputable of that group of bungalows was Bagnall, who had been a trombone-player in the orchestra of Drury Lane theatre, and who, becoming tuberculous, had brought his wife, a former ballet-girl, and his two boys down here. Bagnall, with a cheerful optimism rare among performers upon brass wind-instruments, had no doubt of recovering his health and making a fortune by growing early tomatoes. Mark supposed that he must often have passed Covent Garden Market on his way to the theatre and dreamed as he hurried along of Arcadia. If only now, when he was dying and when Arcadia was not turning out what he had expected, he could be made to dream of Paradise, and instead of growing tomatoes that were never early and seldom even by midsummer (so Mark was assured by neighbours) recognizable as tomatoes at all, if only dear Bagnall might be filled with desire to cultivate fruits of the Holy Spirit. Not that he was bad. But he was a

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weak creature, too fond of drinking whisky and relating the horrid symptoms of his illness, while his little wife, with her grey resentful eyes, sat staring out of the gim-crack windows of the bungalow at the hillocks of flints which her two boys day in day out picked up from the ground and heaped up at their father's urging.

Mark debated with himself about paying a visit to the Bagnalls, but he had not the heart for such a visit so soon after that little church, although he knew that he was shirking his duty and indulging an æsthetic emotion at the expense of his charity. Besides, the sun was getting low now, and he ought to be back in time to offer to say Evening Prayer, even if the Vicar did not expect him. He hurried on past the squalid field, and for a while the road ran between a sloping coppice of beeches on the left and Squire Melville's woodland on the right. It would be jolly to own acres of trees like Squire Melville, and to pace soft-footed up and down the verdurous glades in perpetual meditation. Yet old Jack Diamond was just as happy as Squire Melville, for he was able to pass all his day in leafy dreams, and he did not own a single tree. Yes, Jack Diamond was the happiest of all the Oaktown oddities. Jack Diamond, commonly known as Colonel Diamond, had spent his youth and middle age in the South Seas, and now he had come home and with the little money he had saved had bought a small patch of land at the foot of the beeches. Here he had built himself one room raised upon wooden piles like a lake-dweller, on the veranda in front of which he spent the whole of his time in the contemplation of Squire Melville's woods spread out before him, except when once a week he stumped in to market on his wooden leg to buy his provisions. He did his own cooking. On windless days he fetched the stove outside on the veranda and gazed over the woods while his bacon was frying. He was a handsome old man with drooping white moustaches, who habitually wore a large hat of the kind that is now associated with scouts. Probably it was this hat that procured him the rank of Colonel from everybody in Oaktown except Major Kettlewell.

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The old man was sitting on his veranda now, and Mark hailed him as he went by :

"Good afternoon, Colonel!"

"Good afternoon, Padre!"

Neither of them was entitled to the appellation the other conferred; but Mark walked the more briskly for his, and old Jack Diamond sniffed the rising sap in Squire Melville's woods with a deeper relish for the courtesy paid him with such good will.

The road now swerved and ran for awhile between hazel hedges, at a green gate almost buried in which Mark stopped presently and shouted, "Mr. Pluepott!"

There was no answering shout, and Mark was wondering if he should go through and climb up the steep zigzag path that led to Mr. Pluepott's bungalow, when he heard a thin, tired voice call down from above.

"Who is it? Oh, it's you, Mr. Lidderdale. Come up, won't you? Pluepott's out, as usual, but I can take any message."

Mark knew that Mrs. Pluepott only lived to receive visitors, and he had not the heart to refuse her the pleasure of a few minutes. Moreover, her husband, a most obliging man, considered himself better rewarded by a visit paid to his wife than by any more material offering. The practical and industrious Pluepott had been a cobbler in Bedford who had come to Oaktown in search of health for his consumptive wife. Unlike most of his fellow-settlers, he had quickly adapted himself to the conditions of life in Oaktown, and had soon made himself indispensable. He was a jack-of-all-trades here and master of most of them. He could superintend the removal of furniture, tackle a swarm of bees, cure fowls of the pip, mend a gate, grow good vegetables in his own and other people's gardens, milk a cow and sell the milk. Nothing came amiss to him here except his own trade of cobbling, which he abandoned entirely.

Mrs. Pluepott was devoted to her husband, but she felt bound to lament the gay life of Bedford and to complain incessantly of the dullness of Oaktown. Unfortunately they had no children, so she had nothing to occupy her except the diminutive bungalow in which

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they lived. She used to keep this in such beautiful order that Pluepott often declared he was sure she wished it was possible to polish corrugated iron, for in that case the outside of his house would have shone like silver.

"Well, Mrs. Pluepott, how are you?"

"Thank you, I'm just about the same, Mr. Lidderdale. Kindly take a chair."

"I mustn't stay a moment. I've been having a day off, and must get back to my duties."

Mrs. Pluepott's thinness and weariness always drove Mark into using his most robust curate's manner.

"I'm afraid that this is no kind of a place to take a day off," Mrs. Pluepott sighed. "Now in Bedford, where we used to live, anyone could have a day off, and it was a day off. But, dear me, night and day's all one in this place, you might say. I was only saying to Pluepott this morning, 'Well, it may be doing my chest good (which it isn't, or not so much good as all that), but it's not doing my head any good; and if I would have been took to the hospital in Bedford, I'll be took to the asylum here before I've done with life.'"

"Come, come, Mrs. Pluepott, it's not so bad as all that. But I really mustn't stay. I want you to ask your husband the next time he drives up to Medworth if he'll be kind enough to drive on to Green Lanes, and ask at the Parsonage for six candlesticks which Mr. Dorward the vicar has most kindly presented to our brick-kiln."

Candlesticks conveyed to Mrs. Pluepott's mind a suggestion of something to clean and polish; so with a wan smile, that in her was the equivalent of an outburst of joyful emotion in anybody else, she assured Mark that Pluepott should fetch the candlesticks at once.

"I'm sure it's very kind of the reverend gentleman to send candlesticks to such a wretched place as this."

"I was wondering," Mark said tactfully, "if you would find it too tiring to walk as far as the brick-kiln—I really think we must give up calling it the brick-kiln, and call it St. Luke's Mission—but, as I was saying, I wonder if you'd find it too far to walk down there occasionally and polish the candlesticks?"

Mrs. Pluepott's eyes glittered.

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"Well, of course I do find it a bit of a pull up to the house from our gate. Whyever Pluepott wanted to build up so high for is more than I can tell you or anyone else. But I daresay I could manage it, if I didn't rush up the steps too fast."

Mark thanked her effusively, and sat on chatting about the various schemes he had for transforming the old brick-kiln into a dignified place of worship. Mrs. Pluepott sighed deeply at every suggestion he made; but he was not too much discouraged by that. When he rose to go, he said:

"Oh, by the way, I shan't be taking the Sunday afternoon service for the next month or two. The Vicar is so pleased at the way the dear people of Oaktown have supported us that he is going to take the service himself."

"Well, that'll make a bit of a change, won't it?" Mrs. Pluepott said. "And I'm sure in a dead-and-alive place like this we ought to be grateful for anything as does that."

Mark told himself, as he hurried down the zig-zag path to the road, that he had deserved this, for he reproached himself with having volunteered the information about the Vicar with a hope at the back of his mind that Mrs. Pluepott's face would fall, and that he would have been able to gratify his sense of injury by gulping down the expression of her profound regret.

"It served me jolly well right," he said, and for a penance he denied himself the pleasure of stopping at the brick-kiln and planning where he should put Dorward's candlesticks until the time should be ripe for him somehow to obtain an altar.

CHAPTER VI

THE MISSION TO THE HOPPERS

MARK tried loyally to bring as much enthusiasm to the task of superintending the Sunday school as he would have brought to the process of building up the Oaktown mission into something that was really worth while. It was difficult, because all his proposals for making that Sunday school what it ought to have been long ago—the heart and focus of the parochial life—were turned down. He could not understand why Shuter, who admitted frankly that without the children it was impossible to consider that one had done anything to make catholicism vital in Galton, should display his usual timidity in this case. It was true that the teachers were a dull crowd, but for that he had only himself to blame, because he had failed when he first came to St. Luke's to create future teachers out of the children with whom he began.

"I am entirely at one with you, Vicar," said Mark in the course of an argument over one of his proposals, which were never called proposals, but always alluded to slightly as innovations. "I perfectly agree with you about the possibility of doing too much in the church, and I assure you that I am not trying to give the people fancy cakes before they have eaten their bread and butter."

"I wish, Lidderdale, that you wouldn't always be so ready to use extravagant metaphors. You run the risk sometimes of appearing flippant, if not positively irreverent."

Mark held in his nerves. When the Vicar started to talk like this, he wanted to tweak his beard.

"I know," Mark said, "that you think I am thirsting after spiky services, and that I am bored by the in-

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definite ritual of St. Luke's. But I assure you that I'm not caring that about ritual." He snapped his fingers. "I am only caring about doctrine, and I am caring about giving the children catholic habits. After all, we do want them to go to Mass, and these stamps you object to will get them there."

There had recently appeared an ingenious system by which the children of Sunday schools were given stamp-albums. Every Sunday and Saint's Day had its separate stamp that could be obtained by hearing Mass on that day. Prizes were given for the best collection, and new stamps were printed every year. There was a system, too, by which attendance at Sunday school secured a post-mark on all the stamps collected during the week. Moreover, the various legends and symbols embodied in the designs had an instructive value. The colours followed the ordinary liturgical sequence, except that the stamps for the greatest festivals were golden, and the festivals of the B.V.M. were celestial blue.

"I'm not arguing that the system may not be a good one," the Vicar said. "But I think that there is a danger of the children's acquiring the habit of attending the celebration of the Holy Eucharist merely to obtain a stamp."

"But what does it matter if they do?" Mark exclaimed. "You're never going to make children religious with the unaided and disinterested spirituality of men and women who have battled for years with life, and found in the pure worship and love of God their only satisfaction at the end of it. The point is that you make the hearing of Mass a habit, and unless the Holy Sacrifice is a joke, they will be in a better position to receive the grace of God than those who have only heard Mass as an exception or not at all."

"I doubt if your contention is theologically sound," the Vicar objected.

"Well, then I'll put it another way. The tendency of human beings is to return to their youth. Second childhood is a commonplace of description. My contention is that just as people are seized with a longing to revisit the scenes of long ago, scenes which the process

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of time will have enchanted, so equally people who hear Mass in childhood are likely to desire to hear Mass in old age, whatever sins and scepticism may seem to stand in the way of that much-desired former innocence. A deathbed repentance is by no means necessarily the act of a coward. It is quite as likely to be the perception of a truth that life has maltreated."

"Well, no doubt you are right, Lidderdale," said the Vicar. "In fact, I am sure you are. But you are offering greater facilities for our children of St. Luke's than exist. I'm sure that we should have great difficulty in getting the parents to let them stay right through Mattins and the Eucharist every Sunday."

"Then either let them come in after Mattins or make Mattins earlier."

"In other words," said the Vicar bitterly, "change the whole system of our worship here. I knew that was the real object of your remarks."

"Well, of course it would be insincere for me to pretend that I like Glorified Mattins," Mark said. "In fact, I'll go so far as to say that I think Glorified Mattins is an abominable method of worship, and the greatest impediment that exists to England's turning Catholic. But surely next year when I am a priest it ought to be possible to arrange a children's Mass at half-past nine."

The pale cheeks of the Vicar flushed with indignation.

"Most emphatically it won't be possible to arrange any such thing, Lidderdale. You forget that we are not a large London parish, able to draw upon all sorts and conditions of people. I can imagine nothing better calculated to offend our parishioners than a Eucharist for children at half-past nine."

It was very hard for Mark not to let himself go at this. Compromise was bad enough when it sprang from indolence or indifference; but when it took to itself the fierce passions of intense faith or intense unbelief it became intolerable. It was giving lukewarm water the properties of boiling or freezing. Lukewarm, Mark repeated to himself, in grim appreciation of the involuntary appropriateness of the illustration for this particular parish. Yet, paradox though it might be, Mark could

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imagine his Vicar's offering himself as a martyr for the faith of being neither for nor against.

"Please don't think that I'm attempting to criticize you, Vicar," he said. "But isn't the policy of fearing to give offence likely to be fatal in the long run to our creed? Isn't it making a boggy of the Man in the Street? What lies at the back of surrendering such a doctrine as the Virgin Birth, which, as I read them, is implied in the teaching of nearly all the Broad Church divines, though I suppose they might prefer to be called humanists? Why, that sensitive plant the Man in the Street with his tender scepticism: he recoils from the Virgin Birth. Then do not let us insist upon it too harshly. He shrinks from the uncompromising statements of the Athanasian Creed. Then do not let us expose his sensitive ears to such rude assertions. If Christianity is to become a mere system of morality without supernatural authority, I shall have no use for Christianity. If Our Blessed Lord is to be no more than an early edition of Abraham Lincoln, and the Holy Mother of God just a Biblical woodcut of Queen Victoria and St. Joseph the Prince Consort without such tight clothes, and Almighty God Himself a personification of the Common Law . . ."

"This is foolish exaggeration," the Vicar interrupted. "And we have gone right away from the discussion, which arose out of your proposal to institute the stamp system in our Sunday school. I do not approve of the system. I do not recognize its utility. That closes the discussion, which is becoming exceedingly painful. Did Miss Madgett settle with Miss Ethel Smithson which of them would arrange the flowers and change the frontals while Miss Gardiner was away?"

There was another argument a few days later over the services at Oaktown.

"By the way, Lidderdale, I've come to the conclusion that your brick-kiln is not at all suitable for Divine worship. The almost entire absence of windows makes it difficult both for the officiant and the congregation to see what they are doing. Nor do I at all approve of those candlesticks presented by Dorward. I did not grasp

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until yesterday whence they came. I had assumed that they were yours. Dorward was almost insulting to me at a ruridecanal meeting recently, and I have no desire to accept presents at his hands."

"I don't think that Dorward regarded them as a personal gift either to you or to me, Vicar. I fancy he was giving them to God."

"I am fully sensible of his ultimate intention, but the impression on other people is that they were given to me, and as I am informed that he referred to me in the presence of two fellow-priests recently as 'that old frozen nannygoat,' I do not wish to appear under any obligation to him."

"Well, of course, if you can find a more suitable place," Mark began.

"I am going to return to Major Kettlewell's barn. I fancy that he was rather hurt at our not continuing to make use of it, and I think that it would be impolitic to offend him, for he is the principal inhabitant of Oaktown, and is entitled to a certain amount of consideration."

"He kicked up such a fuss about lending it," Mark said, "and was always grumbling so at the mess people made with their muddy feet, that I thought he didn't deserve the privilege of lending it. Personally, I find the fellow a pompous ass, and have no desire to insult God by truckling to Major Kettlewell."

"Your usual exaggeration," the Vicar said.

Something in his tone quenched Mark's hostility, and he apologized. If Shuter would always reprove him in that tone, they would find it so much easier to work together. Perhaps he was more to blame, for allowances must be made for the older man's resentment of a young man's criticism. Mark determined to consider the Vicar's desire not to offend less the outcome of timidity than of a genuine love of his flock. Henceforth he would force himself to regard only the good qualities, to admire his simple piety and respect his gentleness. After all, he as a young man was in a position to take much for granted that older men like Shuter had been compelled to fight for. No doubt, twenty years ago even Shuter would have been regarded if not quite as a pioneer, at any rate as one in

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the forefront of the main body. If his flexibility was merely a mask for weakness, he would give way as readily to a zealous young curate as to an obstructive churchwarden. But Mark's good intentions of a wider charity were too often frustrated by the way in which the Vicar criticized his curate's efforts. He too rarely made use of that tone of gentle reproof, and the tension between them was seldom relaxed. At the same time, Mark recognized that he was himself much to blame for not giving to his work in Galton the same enthusiasm he had given to Oaktown. He detected in his own attitude the germ of that intense individualism which had been the ruin ecclesiastically of so many Anglicans. He was discouraged by his failure to maintain the attitude he had resolved to adopt when he began his work here. The Bishop of Silchester had chosen St. Luke's, Galton, to give him that very experience of the humdrum of clerical life which by his behaviour he was trying to circumvent. He was certainly not sent here to display his capacity for infusing into such a humdrum the excitement of strife with his Vicar. He was not intended to remain in Galton for very long, but he was intended to take away with him when he left an ability to understand and to sympathize with the commonplace of clerical effort. The object in placing him here now looked most unlikely to be attained.

Mark took refuge from his unsatisfactory progress in the practical routine of clerical life in an increased application to that considerable progress in the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures and Doctrine expected from him during his diaconate; and he managed to satisfy the examining chaplain early in the month of May that he had studied adequately the last twenty-six chapters of the prophet Isaiah, the seventy-third to the hundred-and-seventh Psalm, with due regard to the Psalter of the Bible and of the Prayer Book, the Gospel of St. John in Greek, and the first two parts of Butler's *Analogy*. In November he would be called upon to display a general knowledge of the Epistles of St. Paul in English and a special knowledge of the Pastoral Epistles in Greek. He would have to show a ripper and more intimate acquaintance with the creeds and the evidences of Christianity than he had been

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called upon to show for his ordination as deacon. He must be versed in the fifth book of Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity*, and he would be given an opportunity (of which Mark did not avail himself) to show a knowledge of Hebrew. The reason why Mark did not avail himself of this opportunity was not laziness, for he would have been glad to study those early chapters of the Book of Genesis which were specially recommended, but the interruption to his reading caused by the arrival of the hop-pickers in September. Even the Vicar did not reprove his curate's zeal for them, because it was the unanimous opinion of Galton that anything in the least likely to mitigate the nuisance of their annual invasion by human locusts was worthy of praise and encouragement. There was no feeling that either he or Mark was neglecting the heart of the parish by going out into the hop-gardens and using any eloquence they could command to deter these vagabonds from pestering a respectable community. If the church had been closed during that period, not one of the parishioners would have grumbled, provided that the clergy occupied the whole of their time in wrestling with the thievishness, the dirt, the immorality, the violence, and the general beastliness of this scum. If Mark had turned a hop-kiln into a mission chapel he would not have had to contend with the disapproval in which his use of a brick-kiln had involved him. The incursion was like the arrival of the beggars in the old nursery rhyme :

*Hark, hark, the dogs do bark,
The beggars are coming to town,
Some in rags and some in jags,
And some in velvet gowns.*

They came by special trains. They travelled along the road in caravans. They walked from London, wheeling before them perambulators full of lousy babies. Some of those that came by train managed to obtain lodgings among what were called the manufacturing classes. Pariahs already in a respectable rural district, they were doubly so by virtue of their entertainment of these degraded swarms. Those who had come in caravans lived

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in them or in tents. Those who had tramped lived anywhere—under hayricks, in barns, or even in the hedges under miserable remnants of torn sackcloth and old blankets. The noise in the hop gardens as one drew near was like the screaming of a myriad cockatoos and parrots. The fetid smell of so many dirty human beings combined with the acrid smell of the hops to produce one of the most nauseating odours imaginable. The disgusting suggestion of ubiquitous lice was intensified by the quantity of ladybird grubs feeding on the aphides, the most repulsive larva of all in its squashiness and sickly stench of bed-bugs, to which indeed it is closely related.

And yet if one could detach oneself from the noise and smell, the scene in any of these gardens was very beautiful, whether in the morning when the sun shone down through the bines of hops, until as one walked beneath it seemed that one was walking beneath festoons of emeralds, or when in the mellow light of the September afternoon the stripped poles threw their shadows right across the golden green litter of fallen leaves. In such an atmosphere these poor Londoners took on a Southern grace. The blazing weather had tanned their pale faces, and the slatternly girls who carried the big baskets to be measured seemed to have acquired the liteness and nobility of movement that one sees in the women of the Mediterranean. Except that one missed the purple stains and the potent fumes of the grape, it was curiously like a vintage. Compared with the golden calm of the harvest, it was an exotic, almost a frenzied scene, for with the close of the day's work the noise was doubled by fights among the pickers over baskets and by arguments with their paymasters over the measure.

Mark at once decided that hoppers were more important than Hebrew; and when Mrs. Middleditch remonstrated with him for the dirt he was supposed to be bringing back every evening to the Vicarage, he bought himself a tent, telling the housekeeper that he was going to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. He found that this move of his made a great impression on the hoppers, particularly on the children, who thronged to attend his morning toilet. His brushes and sponges fascinated them, and he had

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the same kind of success that he might have had among savages who had never seen a white man.

Gradually, as he got to know the hoppers, he found that many of them came from Catholic parishes in the slums, and he tried to persuade them to come and hear Mass at St. Luke's. But they would not. They insisted that the people of Galton would scoff at them. They were not going to make poppy-shows of themselves by coming to church in Galton. Mark held open-air services morning and evening, which were well attended; but he longed to give these people more than prayer-meetings and sermons and hymns. So he suggested to the Vicar that he should try the experiment of saying Mass out in the hop-garden.

"Oh, no, I don't care about doing that, Lidderdale. I should have no objection from my own point of view. In fact I quite agree with you that it would be an admirable thing to do. But our own people wouldn't understand it. It would offend nearly everybody and throw us back in our work. After all, you must remember that our first duty is to our own parish. These poor people are birds of passage; and, though I think that we should do all we can to help them religiously, I do not think that we ought to scandalize our own parish. No, I'm sorry, Lidderdale. Please don't think that I am hostile to the idea of celebrating in the open air. I am not. But what I had done would certainly be exaggerated in the parish, and I don't care to run any risks."

Mark knew that if he asked the Vicar directly for permission to invite Dorward to come and say Mass in the hop-garden he would refuse, more out of antipathy to Dorward personally than for any weighty reason; but by admitting to Mark that he did not mind the idea of an open-air Mass he might be considered to have given a half consent. It was not like inviting Dorward to say Mass in Oaktown. Although these hoppers were within the boundaries of the parish, they were not in the least parochial. Mark took it upon himself to invite Dorward. These poor people had a right to the Blessed Sacrament. They needed it. It was no use to say that they could come

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to church. The Vicar knew perfectly well that he would not relish their presence in church, even though he might say that he would. They were outcasts. Since they were not accepted in the fold, they needed a shepherd's care.

Mark arranged with Dorward to come and sleep in his tent and say Mass on the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin at six o'clock. In order to promote the fellowship of the occasion, he arranged a concert on the previous evening, which lasted from dusk till nearly midnight, a rousing concert with camp fires crackling and a starry sky above. Dorward sang a comic song, which had a great success not because the song was particularly comic, but because Dorward sang it so incredibly out of tune. Accordion solos provided most of the instrumental music; but there was a banjo and a one-stringed fiddle as well, not to mention the mouth-organs and a penny whistle. When the concert was over and silence, save for the intermittent crying of a baby, had fallen upon the caravans and tents and sleepers in the hedgerows, Dorward and Mark erected an altar by the light of a late moon.

In the morning at sunrise Mark was woken by Dorward's throwing various articles on his camp-bed and muttering to himself in evident agitation :

"Can't say Mass this morning. Can't say Mass. I've forgotten to bring the maniple. No maniple. No Mass. It's that muddle-headed Mrs. Gladstone. I told her to be sure she packed all my vestments. And she's forgotten the maniple."

"Well, you'll have to say Mass without it," Mark replied firmly.

"My dear boy, it couldn't be done."

"Don't be so ridiculous, Dorward. You can't disappoint these poor people at the last minute. Besides, if it comes to that, you'd be restoring the original use of the maniple by tying an ordinary dinner-napkin to your left arm. You haven't forgotten anything else? Have you brought the chalice?"

Mark knew that Dorward was not serious in refusing to say Mass, and after a short argument it was agreed

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that the absence of a maniple would not invalidate the Mass.

"Have you got the cassock and cotta for the server?" Mark asked.

"No cassock," said Dorward. "Don't be so High Church, Mark. You never see the servers in France or Flanders bothering about cassocks."

Mark had discovered among the hoppers a boy who was used to serving at one of the famous East End churches, and there is no doubt that the technical ability, and professional aplomb of this youth, who was not more than eight years old, created an immense impression on the congregation.

When Dorward emerged from the tent, preceded by young Arthur Hearne carrying the missal on Dorward's pillow, a murmur of admiration ran round the assembled hoppers.

"Look at young Art Hearne! Cool! he don't half fency himself, do he?" was a typical comment from the children.

"Oh, will you only look at the little cherrybum, Mrs. Jenkins! Oh, I do think he looks lovely. He might be a little sheraph. Well, I do call this a treat!" This from one of the many mothers.

"Why, the little b—— ain't afraid of nobody! Gaw, who learned your nipper to do it, Bill?"

Bill Hearne, the proud father, spat proudly.

"They learn him down at our church in Poplar. His muvver was always on at me about him. Only I never took no notice of what she said. But I reckon my old woman was about right."

"Watch him now, Bill," the amazed admirer went on. "What's he doing now? Looks like as if he was playing Punch and Judy with the Holy Joe."

Mark looked round and whispered that Arthur was saying the Confession.

The enthusiasm of the hoppers increased with every fresh proof of Arthur's accomplishment.

"Cor! Look at him hending the bottles!"

"Hark at him now with that bell! A proper little muffing-man he'd make and no mistake."

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"Don't he bob up and down like a good 'un?"

"Well," said one matron to another when Mass was over, and when Dorward and Arthur Hearne had returned to the tent as majestically as they had emerged from it twenty minutes earlier. "Well, the clergyman at St. Peter's, Haggerston, have said to me times out of number, he have, that I ought to let our Elfie go and help with the services. Only I never took to the idea somehow. But when I gets back home, you mark my words, Mrs. 'All, if our Elfie don't get packed off to do the same as young Artie Hearne done this morning."

Meanwhile Mark had mounted a barrel and shouted to the assemblage to give him just one minute.

"I'm not going to preach a sermon," he cried, "because nobody wants to listen to sermons when the bacon's frying. But I want all you dear souls to realize what you've been doing this morning. You've been worshipping our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ on His altar. He has come down from Heaven to be among you at your hopping. Our Blessed Lord is glad that you have been able to get out of London into the beautiful country. Our Blessed Lord has not waited for you to come to Him in church. He has come to you out here where you are working. Won't you do something for Him in return when you get back to London? Won't you go to your own parish churches, all of you, and thank Him for this glorious weather and this happy time? There'll be nobody to stare at you in your own churches at home. Give your parson a chance, for I'll bet he deserves it. I know you'll be the happier for it. If you want to remember this fine September morning when you get back to London, go to church. If you find you can't pray, go again. You'll soon learn. And now won't you all kneel down and pray with me the best prayer in the world, the Lord's Prayer? Why is it called the Lord's Prayer? Because it was first prayed by Our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ."

The murmur of all those harsh voices rose above the autumn song of the robins, and to Mark it was the more beautiful sound of the two.

CHAPTER VII

THE ORDINATION OF PRIESTS

THE Vicar was not pleased when he heard of what he called Dorward's invasion of his parish. He described it as gratuitous, much to Mark's amusement. However, since none of the parishioners came to him with a tale of the ritualistic excesses that were committed in the hop-gardens, he did not make so much ado about the open-air Mass as Mark had expected. It was not easy to realize that in his own heart the Vicar was as eager as his curate to give the Catholic Faith and the Sacraments to his people, provided always that it could be managed without offending anybody. The Vicar's continual opposition to all his plans got Mark into the habit of thinking he disapproved of practices which as a matter of fact he was all the while longing to follow. Perhaps jealousy entered into the situation. The Vicar had tried every year to 'do something' for the hop pickers; but he had never received from their manner towards him any encouragement to suppose that he was having the least success. It was evident that Mark knew much better than himself how to get on terms with them, and perhaps this was galling to the older man.

"Don't think that I am trying to minimize your excellent work among the hop pickers this year," he told his curate. "But I am afraid that your reading for your second examination must have suffered."

"I've only given up my Hebrew," Mark replied. "And I really don't think that a sketchy acquaintance with Hebrew is much good to anybody. It's not a civilized language like Latin or Greek."

"Still, it's pleasant to be able to pronounce Hebrew names correctly. It helps a great deal in reading the Lessons."

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Mark, notwithstanding the absence of Hebrew, passed the second examination for priest's orders in November, and when he received notice of this he received at the same time a letter from the Bishop. It struck him as a most absurd letter to emanate from such a man as Dr. Oliphant; but he supposed that it was the traditional letter of the diocese and that Dr. Oliphant had not yet seen fit to change it. Possibly he may even have thought that he could judge the spiritual health of the man as well by his behaviour under this superficial scratching as by probing him more deeply with the lancet of an expert.

High Thorpe Castle.

Nov. 24, 1905.

Dear Lidderdale,

Now that you are about to be admitted into the Holy Order of Priesthood I should be glad if you would send me a personal and confidential letter letting me know

1. *How much time in the week you devote to*
 - A. *Visiting,*
 - B. *The preparation of sermons and addresses,*
 - C. *Reading (apart from the reading you have done for examinations and sermons)?*

*How do you set about preparing a sermon?
How much time do you allow for recreation?*

2. *How much time do you give daily to your private devotions?*
3. *What different kinds of teaching of the young have you been able to carry on?*
4. *Give me a short account of any special case you have been called upon to deal with. Try to say how you have set about the task of giving that person spiritual help.*
5. *In what sphere of your work do you consider that you have been most successful?*
6. *Why do you wish to be ordained priest now, rather than, let us say, six months hence?*
7. *Have you joined the Clergy Pensions Institute?*

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Have you insured your life?

Have you managed to keep out of debt?

8. *Is there anything on which you wish to consult me during the Ember Week?*

Yours very truly,

Aylmer Silton:

Oh, but this letter was really ludicrous! Not a word about the frequency of Communion. Not a word about attending Mass. Not a word about Confession. Not a word about the steadfastness and assurance of his belief. It was a formula for the majority, and perhaps the present Bishop of Silchester was already so much a Bishop that the minority was no longer of great importance to him.

Mark sighed and took up his pen to answer it.

St. Luke's Vicarage,

Galton,

Hants.

St. Catherine's Day.

My Lord Bishop,

1. A. *I visit every afternoon except Sunday.*

B. *I gave a great deal of time to my first sermon, but unfortunately left the MS. in the vestry and preached one extempore. Since then I think of what I'm going to preach as I walk along. It's impossible to say how much time I give. I don't use notes. I sent your Lordship's Examining Chaplain the sermon I left in the vestry, which is the only one I had written down. But, strictly speaking, of course I didn't preach that. I imagine that it will be impossible for me to preach extempore either to your Lordship or to your Lordship's Examining Chaplain, so I very much hope that my only written sermon will be enough.*

C. *I read the Bible a good deal. I consider that all my reading is for my sermons. I read every manifesto by the Broad Church party and then read all I can to dispute their contentions. I*

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should say that I always read for two hours a day at least.

I think that the next question is answered in 1. B. It's impossible for me to explain how I set about preparing a sermon.

My chief recreation is reading. I don't play any games, and I don't go out to dinner, etc., more than I can help.

- 2. I attend the celebration of the Holy Eucharist whenever I have an opportunity, and I say the Office daily.*
- 3. I teach in the Sunday School. I don't approve of the Church Lads' Brigade. I don't see that Christianity is at all helped by mixing up religion with playing at soldiers.*
- 4. I am afraid that I have not yet had any special case. If people have talked to me as people do out of self-indulgence and vanity about their spiritual struggles, I recommend them to use the Sacraments. If I were hearing confessions, I should not be so cursory, and I should try to give spiritual counsel. With this end in view I am reading a good deal of moral theology.*
- 5. I am more successful with poor people.*
- 6. Because I wish to give people the Sacraments as soon as possible.*
- 7. I have not joined the Clergy Pensions Institute. I have not insured my life.*
Yes, I have kept out of debt.
- 8. I hope to make my Confession.*

I am

*Your Lordship's obedient servant,
Mark Lidderdale.*

Mark had just finished his reply to the Bishop when the Vicar came up to his room.

"I've received this letter about you from the Bishop, Lidderdale. I don't know why, but these confidential reports are always rather repugnant to me. I think I

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should like to show you my answer, so that between us everything is quite above board. I'm afraid that one or two of my answers may not please you, but you know my views. This is the Bishop's letter, and this is my answer."

Mark saw that the Bishop's letter to the Vicar was practically the same as the one he had himself received; but the Vicar's answer did not much resemble his own.

St. Luke's Vicarage,
Galton,
Hants.
November 25.

My dear Lord Bishop,

Mr. Lidderdale's sermons are nearly always well thought out and eloquently expressed. He is inclined sometimes to be a little extravagant in his gestures and to use somewhat violent metaphors and profane illustrations, but I sincerely believe that as a preacher he is likely to make himself a considerable name one day. I have not discouraged his preaching extempore, because there is no doubt that extempore preaching appeals to a congregation. I understand that he is in some perplexity about the two sermons he ought to have sent in to the Examining Chaplain. I think it is only fair to him to say that in claiming never to have preached a written sermon he is speaking the literal truth.

I find Mr. Lidderdale conscientious over his visiting. Perhaps he is inclined to neglect one class of our parishioners for another. But I should prefer him to neglect the more prosperous part of our parish, as he does, than that he should neglect the poor, which he certainly does not. He has a pleasant way with the people, and I am sure that they like him.

I really do not know much about his reading. He certainly does not allow it to interfere with his work in the parish. I fancy that he is inclined to be rather fond of novels, and in the matter of recreation I should say he was inclined to smoke to excess. I have had to remonstrate with him once or twice for smoking a pipe on the way to church, which has created a painful impression among several people, though of course I do not suggest

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that there is anything sinful in smoking, so long as it is indulged in at a suitable time and in a suitable place. His work in the Sunday School has been conscientious, but he is always on the look out for educational experiments. The Sunday School teachers do not care for him, but the children do.

I am not aware of his having been called upon to deal with any special case, but I have no hesitation in saying that if he were called upon he would acquit himself well, provided always that he curbed his inclination to give extravagant advice.

I should say that he has been most successful in the human side of his work, in that and in his preaching. He is apt to gabble Mattins and Evensong; so much so that I have several times had to remonstrate with what almost amounts on occasions to irreverence. However, I have no hesitation in recommending your Lordship to admit him to the Holy Order of Priesthood, for while I differ from him in much I believe him to be sincere and to have a genuine vocation for the life he has chosen.

*I am, my dear Lord Bishop,
Your Lordship's obedient servant,
Arnold Shuter.*

"You have been too generous, Vicar," said Mark warmly. "I'm grateful to you both for what you said, and for your kindness in showing it to me."

"I've not said more than I sincerely felt, Lidderdale. There is no need to thank me. I only hope that in your work as a priest you will show forth the power and glory of Almighty God. You will be much in my prayers all this Advent."

The ordination was not held in the Bishop's private chapel at High Thorpe as it had been last year, but in the Cathedral. Mark was glad of this, because Stephen Ogilvie had arranged to spend the Ember Days with him and be present at his ordination. Mark and several other candidates were staying in the Theological College, and they were able owing to the vacation to have their old rooms. Canon Havelock, the Principal, had hospitably found a room for the Rector of Wych, so that Mark

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had the pleasure of his company all that time, and they enjoyed many opportunities for talking.

The Rector was inclined to dwell on the wonder of Mark's achievement of his ambition; and the strange thing was that Mark himself had no desire to trace his development from that day when he had discovered his great friend and preserver in Meade Cantorum church. Indeed, not only did he lack the desire, but the Vicar's continual harping on the past nearly irritated him. He found no reason to give himself, still less could he find a reason for the Rector to account for this unwillingness.

"I had too much self-assurance in those days," he said.

"You had the assurance of perfect faith, old man."

"I must have been a young prig."

"Indeed, you were nothing of the kind. I'm sorry that you look back with so little satisfaction to that time of your life," the Rector continued, in a tone that showed he felt a little hurt.

"Forgive me," Mark begged. "I must be seeming ungracious, and what is more, ungrateful? I don't understand myself."

"You're not repenting of having vowed yourself to the priesthood?" the Rector asked anxiously.

"Of course not. I expect I'm suffering from nerves. In other words, from loss of self-control. I think that a year as a deacon would try anybody. One has all the disadvantages, and none of the advantages of being a priest."

"There's nothing on your mind?" the Rector persisted.

"I must be worrying over not having joined the Clergy Pensions Institute," Mark laughed. "No, seriously, Rector, there is nothing on my mind, unless perhaps I'm wondering if I shall be a good priest. To tell the truth, now that I shall be one within twenty-four hours, I am a little taken aback by the responsibilities. And, after all, it is quite right that I should be."

The Rector was only half reassured by Mark's explanation. Nor indeed was Mark himself convinced by

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it. He was in the throes of presentiment, but presentiment of what he had no idea.

Nor did he arrive at discovering what was the matter with him when he made his confession to the Bishop of Silchester. He accused himself of arrogance, intolerance, impatience, and all those abstract vices that come from excess of vitality or, if one prefers to call it that, excess of self-sufficiency. Mark fancied that the Bishop dealt with his feelings more conventionally and with less attention to him as an individual than he had shown a year ago. He supposed that he had disappointed the Bishop and that he was being relegated into the limbo of moderately satisfactory young parsons. Or had one year of this great diocese disillusioned its Bishop? Had he who had raised such hopes in his own party, and created such apprehension in the ranks of the other side, determined to adopt the Golden Mean? Or was the modern Anglican bishop like the mediæval archdeacon a subject for academic debate? *Num potest salvus esse archidiaconus?* It used to be a brave schoolman, realist or nominalist or conceptualist, that ventured to argue on behalf of an archdeacon's salvation. The very phrasing of the question with its discouraging *num* showed how little an affirmative was to be expected. It began to seem as if that same *num* might nowadays be used for the chances of a bishop's future in eternity.

"But never mind about bishops. There is something radically wrong with me," Mark reproached himself.

And on the next day, when with the other deacons Mark knelt before the Bishop to answer him verse by verse throughout that mighty hymn, *Veni, Creator Spiritus*, he forgot to criticize the Bishop, and surrendered himself to pray humbly for all that was bestowed on mankind through the incarnation of God.

*Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,
And lighten with celestial fire;
Thou the anointing Spirit art,
Who dost Thy seven-fold gifts impart.*

*And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the
spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel*

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and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.

*Thy blessed Unction from above
Is comfort, life, and fire of love,
Enable with perpetual light
The dulness of our blinded sight.*

Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.

*Anoint and cheer our soiled face
With the abundance of Thy grace.
Keep far our foes, give peace at home;
Where Thou art guide, no ill can come.*

But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you; but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him.

*Teach us to know the Father, Son,
And Thee, of Both, to be but One;
That through the ages all along,
This may be our endless song.*

And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou hast sent.

*Praise to Thy eternal merit,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

Mark found the greatest pleasure in illustrating the hymn in his own mind with these texts, which seemed to increase the solemnity of it, and at the same time materially to help it, just as flying buttresses beautify and strengthen a church at the same time.

And then like a blow from an ambush, like the grip of unseen fingers upon the throat, like a sudden squall striking an unprepared ship, like a thunderbolt from a blue sky, like anything that man has ever used to ex-

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press a catastrophic surprise, doubt entered Mark's soul. The hands of the Bishop were upon his head. This was the moment to which the whole of his life had hitherto been directed. He had never once even for a single moment questioned the literal truth of the Christian religion.

Receive the Holy Ghost for the Office and Work of a priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the Imposition of our hands.

Mark looked up in sudden affright, and like some trick of Satan played upon holy men in old tales he beheld the Bishop's mitre as something more comic than a paper cap giving to its wearer the air of a buffoon.

Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven; and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained.

The Bishop's pastoral staff assumed by the power of another Satanic trick the likeness of a tall note of interrogation. The rest of the words of ordination were lost in a bottomless abyss, a huge maw of Doubt. Drops of sweat stood on Mark's forehead. The vastness of the cathedral stifled him as though it had been no greater than a prisoner's cell. *Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief*, he groaned within himself, and tears were in his eyes as they were in the eyes of the tormented father of the child who first uttered that cry. This, then, was the explanation of that presentiment. While all this past year he had been criticizing Shuter for his lack of enterprise, Doubt had been gnawing its way into his own mind. While a few hours ago he had been considering the worldliness of all bishops, speculating about the inevitableness of their decline, and asking why it should be inevitable, Doubt had gnawed through the last fibres of his resistance.

He and all his newly ordained fellow-priests should be singing the Nicene Creed.

"Do I really believe one word that I am singing?" Mark said to himself.

He was not to answer that question finally and posi-

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tively for a very long time, for all that a parchment with the great seal of Silchester proclaimed :

BY THE TERM of these presents WE, AYLMER, by Divine permission BISHOP OF SILCHESTER, do make it known unto all men that on SUNDAY THE EIGHTEENTH DAY OF DECEMBER in the Year of our Lord One Thousand Nine Hundred and Five We, the Bishop before mentioned, solemnly administering Holy Orders under the Protection of the Almighty in OUR CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF SILCHESTER, DID admit our beloved in Christ, MARK LIDDERDALE, LITERATE OF SILCHESTER THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE (of whose virtuous and pious life and conversation, and competent learning and knowledge in the Holy Scriptures We were well assured), into the Holy Order of PRIESTHOOD according to the manner and form prescribed and used by the Church of England; and him the said MARK LIDDERDALE did then and there canonically ordain PRIEST, he having first in our presence made and subscribed such Declaration and taken and subscribed such Oaths as are by Law in such case required.

IN TESTIMONY whereof We have caused our Episcopal Seal to be hereunto affixed the day and year written above and in the third year of our Translation.

AYLMER SILTON :

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIRST MASS

MARK had not lost his faith. There was no violent reaction that left him with a passionate unbelief. But hitherto he had never had even a momentary doubt, and he now found himself assailed by questions and compelled to battle hard to keep what of all his spiritual possessions had seemed the least likely to be attacked. In the dismay of this insecurity Mark had confided in Ogilvie what his feelings had been at the very moment of the Bishop's laying on his hands.

"It's not a case for argument," the Rector had said. "It's a case for prayer."

"I think that faith is always a case for prayer," Mark had replied. "And perhaps I have never really prayed intensely for faith. It was given to me with such generosity that I suppose it never entered my heart or my head to think that what God had given God might take away."

"You should have been particularly on your guard when you were reading those books by the Modernist school. I have no hesitation in saying that they do more harm with their subtle policy of gradual surrender than all the crude and violent attacks of avowed infidels."

"I think that's true," Mark had agreed. "I was reading a book about the Virgin Birth the other day, by a young Oxford don; I believe that he is Divinity Dean at one of the colleges. He prefaced his work by avowing his own belief in the Virgin Birth, after which he examined most sympathetically what the other side had to say. At the end of the book one put it down with the feeling that the only answer to the other side was *Quia Impossibile*. I know that the learned young men are trying hard to bring our creed into line with the advance of modern knowledge. But that's exactly what the great

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heresiarchs set out to do. It's certain that Arius, Pelagius, Nestorius and the rest of them wanted to bring Christianity into line with the most recent thought."

"I always remember some words in *Ecclesiasticus*," the Rector had said, reaching down for the volume from the shelf. "Where are they? The third chapter, if I remember. Yes, here we are:

My son, go on with thy business in meekness; so shalt thou be beloved of him that is approved.

The greater thou art, the more humble thyself, and thou shalt find favour before the Lord.

Many are in high place, and of renown: but mysteries are revealed unto the meek.

For the power of the Lord is great, and He is honoured of the lowly.

Seek not out the things that are too hard for thee, neither search the things that are above thy strength.

But what is commanded thee, think thereupon with reverence; for it is not needful for thee to see with thine eyes the things that are in secret.

Be not curious in unnecessary matters; for more things are shewed unto thee than men understand.

For many are deceived by their own vain opinion; and an evil suspicion hath overthrown their judgment.

"Those are words of great wisdom. I do not think that such ancient observations upon the characteristics of human nature have been supplanted, or even much added to, by all our weight of modern psychology. And I cannot help wondering if modern knowledge has added much to Truth. I am quite sure that it has not supplanted it."

"But that's the mischief of the Modernists," Mark had said. "They don't claim that the Divine revelation has been supplanted or even added to, but that it has been amplified. They want to eat their cake and have it. They want to run with the hare of revelation and hunt with the hounds of empiricism."

"I should leave them alone for a while," Ogilvie had advised.

"But that would mean an admission that I am afraid of them," Mark had protested. "No, my faith has got to be tried. Already I have gained much by a sudden

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comprehension of that second theological virtue, about which I had never thought a great deal until now. For at least I can say that I do hope. I wonder who first thought of the anchor as Hope's symbol? Don't worry about my spiritual future, Rector. The worst that can happen is that I shall become more bigoted than I otherwise might. I will never adapt my religion to modern needs, for in my opinion the adaptation of religion to modern needs means adding so many coats of sugar to the pill that the efficacy of the pill itself is thereby destroyed. Material progress, and most of our knowledge comes from material progress, is only an extension of the sin of Adam. It's the application of man's free will to upset the natural order of the universe."

"You seem very positive for one whose faith has been shaken," the Rector had said with a smile.

"Ah, yes, but at the back of everything I am telling myself that there is always a question. Suppose this is all untrue? Suppose that this never happened? All I can say all the time positively and fervently is that I hope it is true and that I hope it did all happen and that I hope for immortality, and for salvation in eternity."

Mark would have preferred to say his first Mass in the little church of Green Lanes; but he knew that to do this would hurt the feelings of his Vicar, who would be quite unable to understand such a desire. And he was very glad that he had not suggested this when the Vicar asked him to say his first Mass on St. Thomas's Day.

It struck Mark for the first time that the Church, in decreeing the commemoration of St. Thomas four days before Christmas, had shown a profound sense of dramatic fitness. St. Thomas was perhaps of all the apostles the one most easily imaginable in the present, and his sturdy scepticism must have been the consolation of many Christian souls. Now just before the festival of the Incarnation, which was to put such a strain on humanity's will to believe, the Christian world was reminded in the story of St. Thomas that faith was not easy and that even one who had beheld the miracles and heard the very speech of our Blessed Lord was yet able to doubt. How much that incredulous disciple had done for generations

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of Christians to come, for without his questioning spirit the narrative of Christ's appearances after death might have been criticized so much more easily as a narrative that deliberately sought for marvels. Moreover, was not Thomas the disciple who, when danger threatened his leader, was the first to urge that they should all accompany Him into Judaea that they might die with Him?

There were no bouquets or cards for Mark's first Mass; and there was not a large congregation in St. Luke's Church on the morning of the twenty-first of December. In fact, apart from the Vicar, it was composed of two pious ladies. Mark had rehearsed the ceremonial many times, and he did not feel nervous, or rather he did not feel any nervousness about his practical ability to get through without blunders. He did have a spiritual nervousness that when he reached the words of consecration he should fail in awe of what his humanity was privileged to effect. The verses in the Gospel of St. John about St. Thomas were of the greatest comfort:

Reach hither thy fingers, and behold My hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My side: and be not faithless, but believing.

*And Thomas answered and said unto Him,
My Lord and My God.*

And when the moment came for him to whisper the mighty words of consecration, the soul of Mark cried out with the Blessed Thomas in eternity, My Lord and My God. This is Thy Body. This is Thy Blood.

Thenceforth in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament Mark was never assailed with doubt; but when he was away from the Blessed Sacrament his mind was always vulnerable. He had never been slow to insist upon the necessity of bringing people to the feet of Christ by such a boundless channel of Grace; but he had done so as it were from an external conviction rather than from living knowledge and experience. Now when his own weakness without It was plain, he demanded It for hungry souls with such passion as a mother might demand bread to feed her starving children. Nothing in religious observance that did not lead directly to God upon the altar seemed to Mark anything but a waste of time.

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"Nobody questions the ethical value of Christianity except a few oversexed egomaniacs," he declared. "But we must make the living God more than a copy-book of Divine maxims. The failure of Christianity has been, is, and will be that neat copy-book religion, which can be blotted and scribbled over and defiled and torn to little bits by naughty boys. No priest who allows for one moment that human nature can approach Christ except through the Blessed Sacrament is worthy of his order."

These were the words that Mark used when the Vicar questioned the advisability of a midnight Celebration upon Christmas Eve.

"Nobody is more anxious than myself, Lidderdale, to bring people to the Blessed Sacrament. But we should do wrong for the sake of a few to offend the many."

"No, no, no," Mark cried. "You're wrong, Vicar, you're wrong! Here and now in this room I have my doubts about the Virgin Birth. I wonder if the Ascension is to be accepted as one accepts an historical fact. I ask myself if the Transfiguration may not have a perfectly natural explanation. I even ask myself if the whole of our Christology is not due to the mythopœic impulse of mankind. But away from this room and in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament I don't care that about historical facts. My Lord and my God is there."

"I'm afraid that I don't quite follow your reasoning," the Vicar said. "I don't quite see how you can believe in the Real Presence of our Lord on the altar and apparently have doubts about His Real Presence on earth nineteen hundred years ago. It doesn't seem logical."

"Logic! Logic!" Mark cried. "The cruellest opinions and the most atrocious behaviour have been expressed or committed in the name of logic. But to return to the point at issue, Vicar. Would you have any objection to my having a midnight Mass in the basilica at Oaktown? Nobody is going to be offended there. I do wish you'd give your consent. I can't help feeling that Oaktown ought to have some service for Christmas, and you know how hopeless it would be to try to get them out on Christmas afternoon."

"Very well," the Vicar agreed after a pause. "I give

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my consent. In that case you'd better take the eight o'clock Celebration, and I will take the midday Celebration here."

But at the last minute, when Mark had made all his arrangements and exacted promises to attend from all his adherents in Oaktown, the Vicar said that, painful though it was for him to have to do so, he was afraid that he should have to withdraw the permission he had given. He had mentioned the proposal to several of the parishioners, and they had all exclaimed at the idea of celebrating the Holy Eucharist in a brick-kiln.

"I'm sure that the early Christians celebrated the Holy Eucharist in far stranger places than our brick-kiln," Mark burst out indignantly.

"I really do not see how that bears on the argument," the Vicar said.

"I thought you High Church people set such store on Early Christianity," Mark retorted bitterly. "If ever we Catholics argue in favour of some modern Roman innovation, you always use the apostolic argument."

"I see no reason for you to be insulting, Lidderdale," said the Vicar, tugging at his beard in great agitation. "I'm sorry about having to change my mind. Unfortunately your flock at Oaktown has not impressed the neighbourhood favourably, which I dare say may have something to do with what I found was a very definite feeling against holding a service there on Christmas Eve."

"It's just as much your flock as mine," Mark exclaimed. "In fact, they are more your flock than mine. And as for listening to such abominable, such scandalous and vile snobbery as that which would deny them access to Our Blessed Lord, because Squire Melville has missed a few hares and one or two of the people get drunk occasionally, which wouldn't be noticeable if they hadn't to walk such a long way home. The Galton people get just as drunk. More drunk. And the Galton people are twenty times as lascivious as the few poor devils at Oaktown who are living there openly unmarried. Personally I prefer the Oaktown form of sexual indulgence."

"All this is absolutely beside the point," the Vicar said coldly. "My decision has been taken for the general

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good of the parish, and I ask you to set aside your own feelings and opinions in the matter and accept that decision as loyally as you can."

Mark was in despair. He should have to walk out to Oaktown immediately and make some ridiculous excuse for the abandonment of the service. He had insisted so much on the importance of the occasion, and now he must let them think that in spite of its importance it could quite easily be given up. He could not tell them that the Vicar had forbidden it because the Pharisees of Galton considered that too much attention was being paid to the Samaritans of Oaktown, still less that the Pharisees of Galton had been offended by the notion of holding such a service at all. And he certainly was not going to say that the brick-kiln basilica was considered an unworthy place of worship. The Vicar might prefer Major Kettlewell's barn; but he hoped himself this year to say many Masses in that basilica, and Major Kettlewell's barn was never going to be used by him.

Mark had an inspiration. Would it be possible to persuade some of his Oaktown adherents to walk all the way to Green Lanes and hear Mass at the little church there? Who would come? Surely some of them. The old Poleys would find it too far. But the Chilcott boys might come. Perhaps it was not the best way to give people Catholicism, the way he was giving it to the Chilcott boys, because they knew it would annoy their father. But so long as they got the true religion, what did the means matter? Besides, their old father was happy with his chapel in Westbourne Grove. The Bagnall boys would probably come, and some of the Hobdays. He might even persuade old Colonel Diamond to come by hinting that he could not walk as far with his wooden leg.

Mark had another inspiration. He would give a Christmas Eve party in the brick-kiln before they set out. It was not the strict way to keep a vigil, but never mind about that. Besides, Christmas Eve was a Sunday, and the fast would have been kept on the Saturday. And it was Friday already. He would have to hurry round and secure some eatables before the Galton shops were sold out.

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"I've decided to have a party at Oaktown on Christmas Eve," Mark told his Vicar. "You've no objection to that?"

"You remember it will be Sunday night?" said the Vicar.

"Well, I was going to ask if you'd let me stay away from Evening Prayer at St. Luke's."

The Vicar looked doubtful; but he was afraid that Mark was going to resume the question of a midnight Eucharist, and he was evidently relieved to find a compromise.

"Very well, Lidderdale. It's rather unusual to hold a parish treat on Sunday evening, but I think it can be justified in this case, as the people here will be having parties every day next week, so that there will be no opportunity to give one in Oaktown. Very well. I shall not expect you back to Evensong."

"I wonder if you'd lend me Carrie to help hand the cakes round?"

"Oh, you must settle that with Mrs. Middleditch. I'm afraid that she may be wanting Caroline for the preparations here. But of course if you require the girl's services, you may ask Mrs. Middleditch. You can explain that I don't want her as long as she can be spared from the house."

Mark was so much elated with his plan that he attacked Mrs. Middleditch without trepidation.

"Take Caroline out on Sunday evening!" the house-keeper gasped. "Whatever next is anyone going to ask me?"

"Now listen, Mrs. Middleditch. So far as the Vicar is concerned, Carrie has leave to help me. If you raise objections, I shall argue this matter hour by hour until the Vicar gives way in spite of you. You'd much better surrender with a good grace and let us have peace and good will in this house. We shall have neither if you don't let Carrie come. There'll be no peace, because I shall go to war with you for as long as I am here, and I shall bear you such ill will and make myself so unpleasant that you'll be sorry you ever crossed me. Be a sensible woman and say 'yes' prettily, smile, and I'll

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give you a kiss under the mistletoe on Christmas morning."

"Did anyone ever hear the like of it?" Mrs. Middleditch asked helplessly. "Caroline!"

Caroline came bounding impetuously to ascertain her ruler's need.

"Caroline, Mr. Lidderdale has asked me for you to help wait at a party on Sunday night, and I've said you may go."

"Oh, thank you, Mrs. Middleditch," cried Carrie. "Oh, and thank you, Mr. Lidderdale. Well, I declare I never expected any such a thing, I'm sure. I'll have everything nicely laid for the Vicar's supper, Mrs. Middleditch, never you fear. And anything you want done for you, Mr. Lidderdale, I'll do it and only be too pleased."

Mark pressed home his victory by requesting Carrie's services in the market that very night, so that he should not forget what was wanted when he laid in his stock of good things.

It was a very successful party, and the way Carrie managed the drinks and the cakes and the almonds and raisins and the Elvas plums and, best of all, the flaming snapdragon that brought the evening to a close was half its success. There were plenty of crackers and plenty of games. The Hobday girls, pink and fluffy, tried to get up some dances; but the floor of the kiln was not meant for dances, and as nobody knew any country dances and there was nobody to play Sir Roger de Coverley, the Hobday girls had to make the best of round games.

"Though fancy playing games nowadays," said Mabel Hobday. "Quite old-fashioned, are they not, Mr. Lidderdale?"

Mark said that he supposed games were old-fashioned, but that he liked old-fashioned things.

"Old-fashioned things are all right sometimes," Gladys Hobday put in. "But it would be dreadful never to have no novelty, would it not, Mr. Lidderdale?"

"That's all the young people look for nowadays," Mrs. Poley asserted in a ferocious whisper. "I'm sure when I was a girl we couldn't abide anything new. My

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poor father was always a staunch conservative, and I suppose we girls took after him."

"Now I like a bit of novelty," Mrs. Pluepott declared. "Pluepott and I had quite an argument about the bustles as were being worn when we was first married. That's what I say about Oaktown. You never see a novelty here from one year's end to the other."

"You see some very funny hats go past," Mrs. Poley breathed savagely. "Some may call 'em the season's novelties, but I wouldn't care to say what I call 'em."

"Mrs. P.'s 'ot on 'ats," her husband said in a jovial aside to Mark, which included a gentle prod in the ribs, for Mr. Poley had had a couple of stiffish whiskies, and under their influence his wife's quarrel with the congregation of St. Luke's was assuming a slightly comic aspect.

"William," she said severely, "will you please remember what I told you before we come out?"

"I've only had two, my dear," said Poley, winking at his host.

"Well, I'm not going to warn you twice," said Mrs. Poley.

"Come along," Mark said. "Let's pick up sides for *Nuts and May*. Poley, will you match yourself against Pluepott?"

At ten o'clock, when the snapdragon had burnt itself out and the last lukewarm raisins had been timidly picked off the dish and eaten by the older members of the party with many prophesies of the way they should pay for it that night with the indigestion such rash behaviour would give them, Mark called for volunteers to walk with him to Green Lanes and there attend the service it had been found impossible to hold here.

"It's a glorious night," he proclaimed. "As warm as April and full of stars. And it's Christmas Eve. Who's coming with me?"

"I'm game to come along with the cart," Pluepott offered, "and give a lift to all and sundry when they want it."

In the end the expedition, for to the guests a walk to Green Lanes at this time of night was nothing less than a formidable expedition, consisted of the three Chil-

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cotts, the two Bagnall boys, the Hobday girls, Mr. and Mrs. Pluepott, Carrie, and old Colonel Diamond. Poley was anxious to come, but Mrs. Poley feared for her chest, in spite of Mrs. Pluepott's recklessness over hers, and Poley, even with the help of a third whisky and a great many raisins soaked in brandy, was not brave enough to face domestic opinion when he returned.

Mark had not warned Dorward of the congregation he was bringing, but he did not think that anything would surprise that man of faith whose confidence in the will of God was such that if Mark arrived with a troop of fallen angels to worship at the Crib he would scarcely be disconcerted.

The party set out boisterously, making the tree-shadowed road ring with their merriment as the lanterns bobbed up the long climb to Medworth. Mark had thought it more prudent not to lead them by the grassy byways, where the deep ruts would have made Pluepott's task too difficult. But when the merrymakers emerged from the darkness of the trees and walked under the great starry sky along the high ground before Medworth, a silence fell upon them for awhile. They came under the spell of this night, and the procession moved so gently that the wind, never quite still about these uplands, was heard lisping in the withered grass of the rides that bordered the road.

Presently Carrie asked Mark if it would matter should they sing carols. Mark thought that nothing could be more appropriate to their nocturnal purpose; but, unfortunately, nobody knew any carols. However, the women of the party managed to sing a considerable portion of *Adeste Fideles*, or, perhaps to be more accurate, to sing the first few lines a considerable number of times in the poor English of the version in *Hymns Ancient and Modern*. Their voices were not good, and they were seldom in tune; but their singing expressed, it would have been difficult to say how, the twinkling of the stars, and it was in perfect harmony, though again it would have been difficult to say how, with the warm winter night.

There were no lights in Medworth village or in Med-

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worth church as they passed through; and when they reached Green Lanes all was dark and silent there except for a dim glow beyond the last cottage of the hamlet, a glow which, as they drew nearer, took on the luminous outline of the little church with all its windows shedding golden beams from the candlelight within.

They entered on tiptoe as midnight struck from the belfry of Medworth church, each note of which seemed to sail across the silent country like some solemn and invisible bird. The congregation assembled from Green Lanes was not large. There was Cassandra Batt, who was officially sexton, but acted as clerk and sacristan, and if necessary as acolyte, lector, exorcist, doorkeeper, and subdeacon as well. There was Jane Frost, the organist, who with her anæmic complexion and hair pale as raw silk looked, seated at the little Positive organ, like a St. Cecilia in faded tempera. There were half a dozen sleepy choirboys, who woke up when the Oaktown party arrived and opened their eyes so wide that it seemed improbable they would ever again close them in sleep. There was a labourer whom Dorward employed in the garden, and five minutes after Mass had begun there was Mrs. Gladstone, dressed in what looked by candlelight like a bridal costume of spangled white satin. Mark watched his flock during Mass. He could see that they were perplexed by Dorward's mutterings, by his genuflexions and bowings and kissing of the altar, and, most of all, by his violent and rapid crossings during the Canon, which to anyone who did not grasp the significance of his gestures might have given the impression that he was stirring up something that simply would not mix. Yet they were evidently aware of reality beyond the outward appearance of strangeness, and when Mass was over and Dorward led the way to the Crib, they followed him like little children who approach a Christmas tree. It was a Crib of the most elaborate kind, with ox and ass, and shepherds, and angels suspended above on wires from the roof of the church. But Dorward's prayers before the image of the Holy Child were simple enough, and by the way his pilgrims were behaving Mark felt sure that their pilgrimage had been worth while.

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When the service was over, Dorward invited everybody to come down to the Parsonage and have hot soup.

"But, Father, there's no fire," Mrs. Gladstone protested.

"Why didn't you keep it in, Mrs. Gladstone?"

"Well, Father, I asked you, and you told me not to."

"Then you must light it again, Mrs. Gladstone," Dorward said severely.

"But, Father," his housekeeper sighed, "there's no stock."

"Tut-tut-tut! I'm sorry," said the hospitable Vicar, "but I'm afraid that we can't offer you hot soup. What can we offer them, Mrs. Gladstone?"

"I could get out some mince-pies, Father. But they'd be cold, unless they can wait until I get the fire going again."

"We can offer you some cold mince-pies," Dorward announced. "Delicious mince-pies. Mrs. Gladstone is famous for her mince-pies."

In the end Mrs. Gladstone, who was every bit as hospitable as Dorward himself and who had only been momentarily taken aback at the idea of feeding twenty people at one o'clock in the morning without any warning beforehand that this provision would be expected of her, produced a wonderful collection of dainties, of which all except Mark and Dorward himself ate heartily. They both had to fast, of course, for both had Mass to say on Christmas morning.

It was nearly half-past three when the Oaktown pilgrims reached home. Mark had not attempted on the way back to expatiate on the religious aspect of the season, and he was beginning to wonder if from a religious standpoint this tiring walk back had been worth while. Would it mean anything more than a jolly evening, in the course of which games had been played and crackers pulled, and, as an original way of winding things up, a long walk had been taken to a funny little church where an eccentric parson had held a queer kind of a service? The answer to his question came from Jack Diamond, who with the Bagnall boys was the first to reach his

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destination. The old man paused in the starlit roadway and held Mark's hand.

"Well, Padre, I guess I've knocked about more than most and spent Christmas in most kinds of any old way. But I never spent it so sweet as this one. Speaking for myself, but I guess I shouldn't be far out if I was to say I was speaking for all of us, I've had a rare good time, and I seemed to get the hang of it all more to-night than I ever did."

This was all that Mark had hoped, and he was glad. If anything was wanted to make him feel more surely the good will of this night, it was when Pluepott insisted on driving him and Carrie all the way back to St. Luke's Vicarage.

CHAPTER IX

PREACHING

MARK's arrival with Carrie in a state of complete fatigue at half-past three of Christmas morning created a good deal of feeling in the Vicarage.

"I hope she won't be *hors de combat* for long," Mark said to Mrs. Middleditch, when the housekeeper complained to him bitterly of the way Caroline was setting about her Christmas duties at home.

"Of course, she oughtn't to have taken so long to come back! And I'm surprised at you, Mr. Lidderdale. Why, I couldn't think whatever it was when I heard her go blundering up the stairs to her room. 'Surely,' I said to myself, 'the house can't be on fire at this time in the morning?'"

"Ah, well," Mark replied with a smile, "I dare say the shepherds got into trouble with the Bethlehem farmers for going off like that with a host of angels, and leaving their sheep to look after themselves."

It was obvious to Mark that the Vicar disapproved of his behaviour, but as it would have been difficult for him to blame his curate openly for what he had done nothing was said.

This was the last excitement for many weeks. Parochial life pursued its dull course; and though Mark tried to do his duty with as much added enthusiasm as would put some life into a workaday task, he did not feel that the first six months of his priesthood were being fruitful either to himself or to the parishioners of St. Luke's. The Vicar steadily put difficulties in the way of developing the Oaktown side of Mark's activities by insisting that, whenever he did celebrate over there, he should make use of Major Kettlewell's barn. This usually involved a correspondence with the Major, who

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would write to complain either that Mark was inaudible, or that he threw difficulties in the way of Mrs. Kettlewell's communicating, or that he did not make enough of the solemnity of receiving the alms of the congregation at his (the Major's) hands. Even these occasional Masses were cut down to one a month, because the Vicar decided that it would keep the Oaktown people from attending their parish church if they could get what they wanted without taking any trouble themselves.

"But surely, Vicar, our object as priests is precisely what you take exception to. Surely we are priests for the purpose of giving people what they want spiritually."

"Not if it leads them into self-indulgence."

"But there is no self-indulgence in hearing Mass in Oaktown," Mark contended. "I'm sorry to have to go on arguing with you, but with people like these haphazard creatures it seems to me that we ought to stretch more than a point. Don't forget the Syrophenician woman and the dogs under the table that ate of the children's crumbs. What you are saying in effect is that it is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it unto the dogs."

"I'm saying nothing of the kind," said the Vicar angrily. "Your analogy is false. I am not objecting to these continual Eucharists in Oaktown on the ground that the people who attend St. Luke's are being deprived of anything. If I sought for a scriptural justification of my attitude, I should find it in the parable of the marriage of the King's son. You will remember that when his servants had gathered together from the highways a crowd of guests both bad and good, compelling them to come in, one guest was found without a wedding-garment, and so strict was the King that this guest was bound and cast into outer darkness. That King made no allowances for haphazard creatures."

"You're quoting inaccurately, Vicar," said Mark. "You've confused the parable of the marriage of the King's son spoken upon the Mount of Olives and recorded by St. Matthew with the parable of the great supper spoken in Jerusalem and recorded by St. Luke. It was the man who gave the great supper that compelled

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his guests to come in. When the invited guests made excuses, he sent out for the poor and blind and halt from the streets and lanes, and when there was still room he sent his servants into the highways and hedges to compel them to come in. But there is no mention of one of those guests not having a wedding-garment. The King's guests in the version of St. Matthew were all free to come or not as they would, and therefore they were expected to wear wedding garments."

"I may have made a slight mistake in the two parables, which are very similar," the Vicar admitted. "But my point is that all and sundry were expected to come to the supper."

"You mean that the supper wasn't a picnic," Mark said, with a smile. "In other words, the supper was not laid in the highways and hedges."

"I do wish that you could argue without this flippancy," the Vicar exclaimed.

"I don't intend to be in the least flippanant," Mark said. "And I don't accept your analogy as being any more valid than mine. I still feel perfectly convinced that it is as much our duty to take the Sacraments to the people of Oaktown as we should certainly try to do if they were a lot of naked savages. Rightly or wrongly the people of Oaktown feel awkward in the respectability of Sunday morning at St. Luke's. Moreover, they have to get home again afterwards, and it's a long way. No, Vicar, I'm sorry, but my reading of the Gospel assures me that we ought to do something for these Samaritans even if it were at the expense of the children of Israel, which it is not."

However, these arguments of Mark's never convinced his vicar, and the latter's inclination always to hint that his curate was trying to dodge the dull side of his work stung Mark into throwing himself with tremendous activity into all the parochial organizations, clubs, and entertainments, so that he found little leisure even for keeping in touch with the people of Oaktown, still less for devoting himself to them with as much ardour and perseverance and sympathy as might have made that starry visit to the Holy Child on Christmas night the

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prelude to the resurrection and the life offered by Jesus Christ the Man. It was after one of these arguments that Mark preached in St. Luke's on a text from *The Revelation*:

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot. So then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

The Vicar told Mark at supper that night that he had no reason to preach so bitterly, and that violent denunciations from the pulpit did more harm than good.

"And I particularly object to puns," he said.

Shortly after this there was a proposal to build a hospital for poor consumptives on some land given by a benefactor for this purpose near the outskirts of Galton. The local people, led by Dr. Jayne, the churchwarden of St. Luke's, and other doctors of the town, opposed the scheme on the ground of the injury it would do to the neighbourhood, and they succeeded in wrecking it. Whereupon Mark preached on the verses in *The Revelation* that follow those he had preached upon three or four weeks previously:

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;

I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

Whatever harsh things he had said in the former sermon, he excelled himself on this occasion, and he so greatly offended Dr. Jayne that the doctor told the Vicar that he should have to consider seriously if he could continue to contribute to the stipend of a clergyman like Mark, or even if he could remain one of the churchwardens.

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"I do wish, Lidderdale," the Vicar said, "that you would not exaggerate so in the pulpit. I agree with you that the opposition seemed a little uncharitable."

"Intolerable!" Mark cried.

"But at the same time I cannot help seeing the point of view of a town like this in view of the general nervousness that the fear of infection is likely to cause. I wish you would explain to Dr. Jayne that your remarks about doctors were not intended to apply personally to him or to any of the Galton practitioners."

"But they were," Mark said.

"Well, I'm afraid that I realize that, and I don't at all approve of these individual attacks from the pulpit, and of course unfortunately Dr. Jayne will realize it. But by your disclaiming any intention of being personal, both of you will be on good terms again outwardly and apparently, and I shall not be put to the worry of losing the services of my churchwarden. Also, I do beg you to remember that a portion of your stipend is found by Dr. Jayne."

On Mark's offering to put matters right in his next sermon, the Vicar looked at him suspiciously.

"I really don't care to have the pulpit used in a sort of political way."

"I can assure you, Vicar, that my sermon will not sound in the least political."

So on the following Sunday evening Mark preached upon a text from *Ecclesiasticus*:

He that sinneth before his Maker, let him fall into the hand of the physician.

The sermon itself was without offence, being merely a reproach to people who would not perceive how much of the sickness of the world was due to man's negligence, and to his toleration of what people call necessary evil. But it did not do much to heal the breach between Mark and Dr. Jayne, who, however, did not resign from his office, because he enjoyed having a grievance.

In reading through *Ecclesiasticus* with more care than he had given so far to its wisdom and poetry, Mark came

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across a passage which seemed to him to express more perfectly than anything he had ever read a right point of view about humble folk, and he lost no time in making use of it in a sermon.

The wisdom of a learned man cometh by opportunity of leisure; and he that hath little business shall become wise.

How can he get wisdom that holdeth the plough, and that glorieth in the goad, that driveth oxen, and is occupied in their labours, and whose talk is of bullocks?

He giveth his mind to make furrows; and is diligent to give the kine fodder.

So every carpenter and workmaster, that laboureth night and day; and they that cut and grave seals, and are diligent to make good variety, and give themselves to counterfeit imagery, and watch to finish a work;

The smith also sitting by the anvil, and considering the iron work, the vapour of the fire wasteth his flesh, and he fighteth with the heat of the furnace; the noise of the hammer and the anvil is ever in his ears, and his eyes look still upon the pattern of the thing that he maketh; he setteth his mind to finish his work, and watcheth to polish it perfectly.

So doth the potter sitting at his work, and turning the wheel about with his feet, who is always carefully set at his work, and maketh all his work by number;

He fashioneth the clay with his arm, and boweth down his strength before his feet; he applieth himself to lead it over; and he is diligent to make clean the furnace;

All these trust in their hands; and everyone is wise in his work.

Without these cannot a city be inhabited, and they shall not dwell where they will, nor go up and down;

They shall not be sought for in publick counsel, nor sit high in the congregation; they shall not sit on the judges' seat, nor understand the sentence of judgment; they cannot declare justice and judgment; and they shall not be found where parables are spoken.

But they will maintain the state of the world, and all their desire is in the work of their craft.

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"No words of mine," Mark said, "can sound anything but superfluous after these words, so pregnant as they are with living actual truth. They state the case for the great majority of human beings with such consummate economy of phrase, and yet with such glorious eloquence, that I am going to read you the whole of my very long text over again, so that you shall not miss a precious word, where every word adds something to the perfect whole.

"Is not the very beginning of this passage what some of you in this church to-night have often said to yourselves and to your friends and neighbours? You fathers, how often have you said to your sons, 'Ah, my boys, I wish I had had your opportunities, but I had to go to work when I was your age. I had no leisure to study school-books.' The illustration that follows from the ordinary agricultural life of the time applies absolutely to our agricultural life here in Galton and in the farms round about. It is true that we no longer use oxen in Hampshire, but their use has only died out a very short time ago, and in parts of England they are still used. Who can get wisdom—and by wisdom the writer means more what we call culture, which is the culture of our education and the applying of the fruits of that culture to feed our minds so that those of us who have had the leisure and the opportunity to do this can exercise a wiser judgment than those who have not—who can get this wisdom that is busy all the time in looking after the farm work? Then we have the case of the carpenter and of the smith. The writer of these wonderful words, if he had lived in our times, would probably have taken an example also from those who work underground in mines and from those who drive engines and move about among terrifying machinery all day long. That is more what you must understand by the smith than the village blacksmith, though, of course, the village blacksmith is kept very busy. Then there is the potter. Well, we have thousands of potters working in the Midlands, and nowadays by what is called the division of labour, which, I feel sure, was an invention of the

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Evil One, the potter's work and the work of all handicraftsmen and the work of all industrial labourers is made infinitely more monotonous than was the work of our potter in *Ecclesiasticus*, who at any rate made the whole pot or vessel himself. A modern potter would not fashion the clay as well as lead it over and clean the furnace. A modern potter might go on for ever putting one kind of crinkly line round a cup, always the same line thousands and thousands of times. He will never have much chance of acquiring the wisdom to which our text refers.

"But lest he should be too discouraging with his comments, how does the writer go on? Why, he says that without these humble workers a city cannot be inhabited. He reminds those people of leisure who can go up and down beautiful mountains in Switzerland, and who can dwell where they will in any lovely country they choose; he reminds those members of parliament and those prominent parishioners who sit in the front pews and hand round the offertory bags; he reminds those magistrates and those writers of books that by these humble workers whose desire is in the work of their craft the whole state of the world will be maintained.

"We know that our dear Lord, when He came down to earth, always chose for His disciples and for His friends humble folk, and not merely humble folk, but sinners and outcasts from society. All the way through the Gospel we follow Him from humble abode to humble abode. He chose to be born in a lowly rank of life, and the writer of these words, reputed to be Jesus, the son of Sirach, did not know anything about the wisdom that another and infinitely greater Jesus, the Son of God, would offer even to the busiest folk. For our Blessed Lord spoke not to the heads but to the hearts of men. No ploughman nor carpenter, nor smith nor potter, need be so much occupied with his work as not to be able to get that Divine wisdom of Jesus Christ. It will not make him a member of parliament or a bishop. It will not make him a magistrate, or a writer of books, but it will make him more than ever able to

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maintain the state of the world, and to inherit in the world to come everlasting life.

"And now I want to read you the verses I have chosen for my text right through once again, because they are not familiar words. I am sorry to say that in the very badly arranged lectionary of our Prayer Book they are never read. Other chapters from the apocryphal book of *Ecclesiasticus* are read in the month of November, but this chapter is omitted. Perhaps it was thought that they would give poor people an exaggerated idea of their own importance. Well, I want them to have an idea of their own importance. I want them to realize that even if they are not the heirs of rich men and the inheritors of broad acres, they are heirs of Jesus Christ and inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven. I want them to know that they are maintaining the state of the world, and I want them to be proud of their labour and of their toil and of their craftsmanship. If they are proud of their work, then their hearts will respond at once to much greater words than these, to the words spoken by our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ, because they will know that in the eyes of Almighty God they are every bit as important; and indeed I should be inclined to say a great deal more important than the men of leisure who have used their education and their culture, their opportunities and their rank, for the getting of what is called worldly wisdom. *Many are in high place, and of renown; but mysteries are revealed to the meek.* And for you dear people that toil day in and day out, remember what St. Paul says: *Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?* And again: *God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.*"

Mark was astonished to hear from the Vicar that this brief sermon had caused great offence.

"But in what conceivable way?" he asked.

"Well, I think, Lidderdale, that the parish is still suffering from the political emotions stirred up by the

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General Election. Personally I have nothing to say against the sermon. In fact, I confess that I was moved by the force and fervour with which you spoke. I don't know that I should make a habit of taking about half a chapter for your text, nor should I uphold reading it over three times as a general practice in the pulpit, especially a chapter from the Apocrypha. However, I've no doubt that such a long text is to be considered exceptional. No, I enjoyed your sermon, Lidderdale, and I do not agree in thinking that it was an attempt to preach socialism. I think that some of the conservative members of the congregation misunderstood your intention. I think perhaps that it is a mistake to mention professions or occupations by name. I always try myself not to particularize too exactly. If you had just alluded to very rich men in a general way it wouldn't have mattered. But by mentioning magistrates and members of parliament, not exactly with contempt but rather slightly, you upset Colonel Bellingham, who, as you know, is on the bench; and then, of course, his brother is our Member. Richbell didn't like it either. I believe several people have chaffed him about the solemn way he hands round the offertory bag. After the unpleasantness with one churchwarden, I should have kept off the subject, I think. Still, as I told Tower, who asked me rather pompously if it was true that my curate had been preaching red-hot socialism from the pulpit, well, I spoke quite sharply and said that the report was all nonsense, and a gross exaggeration of the facts of the case."

"I give this place up," Mark sighed. "It really is too stuffy. However, I'm glad that you did not think I was giving a political address. I'm afraid that if Tower says anything to me I shall be rude. Red-hot socialism! One can't help being amused at the idea of anything in Galton being red-hot."

After this Mark's preaching attracted a certain number of people to St. Luke's in the hope of hearing something out of the ordinary run of sermons; but the legend of him as a disturber of the social order collapsed, because Mark himself, in despair of Galton, ceased to preach sermons that had the least actuality, so that presently people were

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beginning to say that they could not understand why he had such a reputation. They for their part found him positively dull in the pulpit. And indeed so he was, for he made no attempt to be anything else.

So the humdrum of parochial existence took its featureless course until one hot day in August, about a week before the Feast of the Assumption, which Mark had been vainly trying to persuade the Vicar to keep, when he came up to Mark's room tugging at his beard in great agitation.

"A most terrible thing has happened," he gasped. "A most dreadful business. It's quite inexplicable, unless you can throw some light on it. Will you come down to my study?"

Mark followed the Vicar, and there, under the gaze of the four major prophets brooding upon her condition, stood Carrie with eyes as red as fire, and Mrs. Middle-ditch standing over her, black and stern, like an executioner.

CHAPTER X

THE WOMAN TAKEN IN ADULTERY

MARK's first thought was that Carrie had been found out in a theft, and he was on the point of offering to make good anybody's loss, when the Vicar began, as it were, to introduce the situation, reminding Mark in his stammering and shyness of the day he first arrived and was met by him at Galton station.

"I have—er—asked you, that is to say I have called you in to assist, to be present—er—to hear what has—er—happened. I have called you in, Lidderdale, because it appears that you may be able to—er—throw some light on this horrible—er—er—this extremely dreadful business."

"But what has happened?" Mark asked.

Carrie fell into a fresh fit of sobbing, and Mrs. Middleditch shuddered through every fold of her black dress.

"It appears that Caroline—er—is—er—likely to be confined."

"In prison?" Mark exclaimed, for he was still under the idea that theft was the occasion of this solemn gathering.

"In prison, no, more's the pity," Mrs. Middleditch interposed savagely.

"Please, Mrs. Middleditch, do not interrupt me," the Vicar said; and while Mark was pondering the gravity of a crime that could make him so reckless of defying Mrs. Middleditch, he suddenly realized what it was and blushed at his own stupidity.

"And it—er—appears," the Vicar went on, "that you might be able to throw some light on it."

Mark stared.

"I? What light could I throw on it? Why, you don't mean to say you suspect me in this matter? I never

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heard such a monstrous suggestion. Carrie, you can't have been so wicked as to accuse me of having anything to do with your condition?"

Carrie wept louder than ever at this, and the Vicar hurriedly explained.

"No, no, Lidderdale. Certainly not. There is not the slightest suggestion that you are the wretched author of this business. I am shocked to think that I conveyed such an idea. No, no, no. But the point is that he is probably one of the Oaktown people. At least Mrs. Middleditch thinks so."

"I think so, because that's always where the girl goes on her afternoons and evenings out, and it's certain she's never been allowed to have any young men hanging round the back door here," the housekeeper affirmed.

"You can do what you like. You can cut me in pieces, if you like," Caroline sobbed. "But I'm not going to say who it was."

She had flung herself down upon one of the Vicar's divans, which no doubt was the first time that piece of furniture had been appropriately used since it was brought from India by his father. Certainly the Vicar could scarcely bring himself even to sit on the very edge of any of them.

"But it is your duty to let us know who it is," the Vicar insisted. "It will be my place to remonstrate with the man on his conduct and do my best to persuade him to marry you, that is, unless he is already married."

"No, he isn't already married. I may be a wicked girl," Carrie sobbed indignantly, "but I'm not so wicked as all that. I wouldn't have anything to do with a married man. Not if he was to ask me on his bended knees."

"Then I really must insist on being told his name," the Vicar went on.

"If I was to tell you his name and you was to go and speak to him, he'd never marry me," Caroline declared, turning to reproach Mrs. Middleditch. "But if I'm let alone, and I would have been let alone if she hadn't found it out . . ."

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"Found it out, you shameless hussy!" the housekeeper burst in. "Why, anyone with half an eye could see what was the matter with you. Fancy!" she went on, apostrophizing incarnate impudence. "Fancy her having the sheer downright audaciousness to think that anyone couldn't have found it out for themselves. Yes, things will be in a pretty state when young girls in respectable places can go and get themselves in the family way and not be found out."

"If I'm let alone so as I can talk to him quietly," said Carrie sullenly, "I dare say he might marry me. But he won't if what's happened gets blazed about all over the place."

"You forthy minx," Mrs. Middleditch exclaimed, wagging her head in reprobation of such an attitude. "I wonder you dare show your face from under your apron. I'm sure if I was you I'd want to go and drown and bury myself. . . ."

"If you please, Mrs. Middleditch," the Vicar interposed, "what we have to do is to ascertain the name of the man. Yes, that is the unpleasant task that lies before us, and that is why we have asked Mr. Lidderdale to try to throw a little light on this catastrophe."

"Mr. Lidderdale knows no more than my unborn baby anything about it," Carrie declared.

"Silence, Caroline!" the Vicar sternly commanded.

"Well, and I declare if she isn't glorifying in her wickedness," Mrs. Middleditch cried out in horror.

The Vicar held up his hand to silence the housekeeper and turned to Mark for help.

"I do—er—earnestly hope, Lidderdale, that if you suspect anybody in Oaktown you will let me know, so that I may—er—take the matter up with him immediately. Of course, nothing can justify what has happened, but it may be possible for the unhappy couple to make the only atonement they have in their power to make by getting married quickly."

"Which I'm sure she doesn't deserve," Mrs. Middleditch put in, folding her arms and raising her eyebrows in scorn. Caroline looked at her enemy as if she would like to say something really rude; but she controlled her-

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self, and with set, sullen lips and hopeless eyes stood waiting in silence to resist the next attempt to extract from her the name of the seducer.

"Carrie," Mark said gently, "I do agree with the Vicar that you owe it to us to let us know the name of the man. It is our duty to do all we can to put things right, not only as friends, but because we owe it to you, my poor Carrie."

"It was as much me as him," Carrie said. "I could have said 'no' if I'd of wanted to."

"Glorifying in it again," Mrs. Middleditch proclaimed. "There's a hot-minded vixen for you!"

Mark turned to the Vicar in exasperation and told him that unless Mrs. Middleditch was sent out of the room he should say nothing more. There was a prolonged battle of looks; but Mark won, and Mrs. Middleditch retired in good order to avoid a rout. Having got rid of her, Mark suggested that the Vicar should leave him and Carrie together.

"But I—er—invited you down to assist, Lidderdale. I did not expect you to take charge of this wretched business. I should have thought . . ." He hesitated and looked at Mark. "If I allow you to—er—investigate the matter, I must insist that I am put in possession of all the facts. I could not accept your managing the affair without taking me into consideration. If that is understood, I will—er—withdraw for the time and pray that you will be successful in bringing this unhappy girl to a sense of what she has done."

But Mark would not give any promise.

"If you have confidence in me, Vicar, you have confidence; and that means that I must be allowed to use my own discretion. The main object of all this, if you will forgive my saying so, is to make things right for this poor child, not to gratify our curiosity."

"The main object is to bring Caroline to a state of penitence," the Vicar contradicted. "If things should turn out better for her than she deserves, she will owe it to the mercy of Almighty God, and she can scarcely expect mercy to be shown her unless she is truly contrite. I feel that in order to bring her to this state of contrition

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I am justified in doing anything that may help, and so I will allow you to speak to her in private."

With this the Vicar surrendered his study to Carrie and Mark and the four major prophets.

Mark went across to the sobbing girl, who had collapsed again upon the divan, and took her hand.

"Carrie, won't you tell me who it is and let me speak to him?"

She shook her head, without looking up.

"I quite understand your point of view in not telling; but if it is somebody in Oaktown, I ought to know, because I feel to some extent responsible, seeing that it was I who first introduced you to Oaktown, as it were."

"Yes, that's what done it," Carrie said. "If I hadn't gone with you to help serve at the party that night, I wouldn't be in the way I am now."

This was a blow to Mark.

"Well then, out of kindness to me, dear child," he said, "oughtn't you to do everything to put it in my power to get things set right?"

"I don't see what it matters to you," Carrie argued. "I don't see because a servant girl goes wrong as you've got any need to worry *yourself*. I'm not arsting nobody to do nothing for me. I know perfectly well as I've only got myself to blame for what's occurred. I wasn't drugged nor nothing, the same as some girls will kid you they were drugged. Only he said I couldn't really love him unless I did. So I did. And that's that. Because I *did* love him. It don't make no difference if you're a servant girl or not if you love anyone. Perhaps I might be able to love more than what you or anyone might think."

"Nothing matters to me, dear child," said Mark gently, "except that you've always been kind to me, and that you're in trouble."

Carrie looked up at him, perplexity knitting her brows.

"I never did more for you than what I was paid to do."

"Didn't you?" Mark said. "Well, I've always flattered myself that you did a great deal more for me than you were paid to do. Come, you wouldn't like me to say to you now that I'm only interesting myself in your

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trouble because I'm paid to do it. Surely you'd prefer to think that I want to help you because I'm fond of you."

"But how can you be fond of me?"

"Why not? Why should I be any less fond of you than any other of my friends?"

Carrie could not help laughing aloud at this.

"Well, if I didn't know you, Mr. Lidderdale, I'd say you was trying to speak sarcastic. Only you never do speak sarcastic. So I suppose it's right what they say you are."

"Oh, do people say that I am anything?" Mark inquired. "What do they say that I am?"

"They say you're a Socialist. And I reckon they're right. Or else you wouldn't go talking of being my friend. Well, it is a bit silly, when you come to think it."

"But my being friends with you, Carrie, has nothing to do with my politics. And perhaps it isn't so silly as you think. In fact, it's just because you do feel in your heart that I'm a friend that you can tell me I'm silly."

"Well, I did have a cheek to say that," Carrie admitted.

"It would have been cheek if I were not your friend," Mark argued. "But as I am, it wasn't."

"But a girl like me can't be friends with a gentleman," Carrie insisted obstinately.

"But I'm not a gentleman," Mark said.

"Oh, go on. Of course you are."

"I'm a priest."

"Well, Church of England clergymen always count with the gentry. Wesleyans don't, perhaps. But then they're called ministers. Some call them clergymen, but that's only ignorance."

"Well, let's agree to differ on that point, Carrie. It's not very important now, and it certainly won't have any importance at all in Heaven."

"Heaven," Carrie repeated to herself. "Do you reckon that's right what they say about Heaven?"

"What do they say?"

"Why, as everyone will be singing for ever and ever and waving palms and playing harps and all that. Because if it is, I reckon Heaven's soppy, I do."

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Mark hesitated for a moment before committing himself to an opinion.

"Nobody on earth can have the least idea what Heaven will be like. All we know is that we shall see God face to face and be happy beyond all imagination for ever and ever. I don't think that I should bother my head about the singing and the harps if I were you."

"I don't bother my head about Heaven at all," Carrie said. "It's no use bothering about something you know you'll never get, and I reckon this baby I'm going to have has put the lid on Heaven as far as I'm concerned."

"Nonsense!" Mark said sharply. He wanted very much to add that the honesty of her attitude had probably brought her much nearer to Heaven than most people; but he supposed that it would be difficult to explain this without making light of what she had done, and he thought he would try to bring this home to her in another way.

"Listen to me, Carrie, and please don't listen to me as if I were preaching a sermon. When you gave way to your lover because he taunted you with not loving him, were you acting selfishly or unselfishly?"

"I never stopped to think. I did love him, and if he wasn't going to believe me I'd got to prove it."

"Then you did stop to think about him. But what you didn't stop to think was about your child. Let's leave right and wrong out of it for the moment. Don't let's bother about God at all. Let's think only of men. Don't you know that an illegitimate child suffers all its life for something that was not its own fault?"

"Well, you might say that of any child. I reckon married people don't think much about what may come. I know my father belted me when I was a kiddie, and if I'd never had a father I'd have been happier."

"Well, suppose somebody wanted to be rude to you. What's the rudest thing they can call you? Wouldn't 'bastard' be the biggest insult of all?"

"Oo! Mr. Lidderdale," Carrie exclaimed in horror. "Fancy you saying such a shocking word!"

"It only means illegitimate," Mark said. "Other

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words with much more dreadful meanings are used, and nobody minds very much."

"But I can't hardly believe you could say such a word. Well, if I was to tell anyone, only of course I wouldn't—well, I wouldn't repeat it for one thing . . ." Carrie was too much overcome to finish the sentence.

"But this dreadful word that so shocks you, dear Carrie, can be said by anybody to your child, and that child will have to put up with it, unless you can get married to this man."

"Well, of course I'd like to be married if I could be," said Carrie. "And that's why I won't say who it is. I know the fellow and what he's like. He's very contrary, for one thing. And if he thought he was being forced into marrying me, he'd do anything rather than give way. Anything he'd do. Because I know him. He's that kind of a fellow. And if he don't marry me after me keeping quiet about him, and if he leaves me—well, then he can't care for me, and I'd rather starve in the gutter, kid and all, than feel he'd married me and never wanted to. That's what my mother did. And she paid for it. And so did I, because my father he put it all down to me, and belted me sometimes so as I couldn't hardly stand on my feet."

Mark saw that no further argument he could bring would be of any avail.

"I shan't try any more to persuade you, Carrie. I hope that you'll be successful. If you're not, you know that you can always count on my help."

"Oh, I shan't bother you if I don't get married," she said. "You nor anybody else. What I done I done with my eyes open."

When Mark told the Vicar of his unsuccess in finding out the name of Carrie's lover, the Vicar replied that in that case she must leave the house immediately.

"But you're not going to turn her into the street? Where will she go? What will she do?" Mark exclaimed.

"I had already made perfectly clear to the girl before I called you down the penalty for not telling me the man's

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name. Besides, I don't intend to turn her into the street. That is one of your exaggerations, Lidderdale. I shall take steps to see that she is received into a home."

"But suppose she declines to go into a home? She is a girl with a very keen sense of the position in which she has got herself. She blames nobody except herself, and she hopes by the decency of her behaviour . . ."

"Decency!" the Vicar ejaculated. "I'm surprised you consider 'decent' the word for her behaviour."

"Well, I'm using decent in a wider sense, Vicar," Mark said a little impatiently. "And must we dispute over synonyms when a human soul is in the balance?"

"Exaggeration again!"

Mark let this pass, for he was too anxious about Carrie to imperil her chance by losing his temper.

"I'm bound to say, Vicar, that I see the girl's point of view, and really I respect it. She considers that she is as much to blame as him. She hopes that by not forcing him to do the right thing, he will do the right thing of his own accord. Apparently her mother got into trouble, and great misery was the result of the man's being forced to marry her."

"She evidently comes of a rotten stock," the Vicar said bitterly.

"That is really nonsense, Vicar. I simply will not accept an expression of humanity's most fundamental impulse as an indication of rottenness. It's by talking such rot that we parsons have lost our influence."

"You are always very severe on Broad Churchmen who surrender vital points of our creed. You are following the same fashion in another direction by surrendering vital points of our moral teaching."

"I'm doing nothing of the kind," Mark contradicted. "But please don't let's dispute about my point of view now. I apologize if I spoke rudely. I want you to keep the girl here until there is no chance of getting the fellow to own up and play the man. If that happens, then of course I suppose the best place would be a home. I should suggest the Community of St. Mary Magdalene, in Shoreditch. Meanwhile, however, it is surely our duty to keep her here under our protection and incidentally to

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bridle Mrs. Middleditch's tongue, which is not calculated to make any girl see the error of her ways."

"I really cannot believe that you are speaking seriously, Lidderdale," the Vicar said. "Do you suppose that it will be possible to keep the girl's condition a secret?"

"No, I don't suppose for a moment that it's possible," Mark replied.

"And what is going to be the effect on the parish of apparently encouraging a girl to sin?"

"The effect on the parish will be the effect of Christian charity's being practised and not merely preached," Mark said.

"You have very strange notions of a country parish, if that's what you think. I've known for a long time that you despise my work here. You've made your opinion only too evident. I've done my best to appreciate your point of view, and I have recognized my own lack of courage in the matter of the services. But I am beginning to believe that you value eccentricity for its own sake. Your attitude in this matter horrifies me by an utter lack of moral feeling. You don't seem to have the slightest desire to impress the girl with the enormity of what she has done."

"I should feel better justified in trying to do that when I had done all I could to guarantee her future," Mark said. "My duty as a priest is surely to be warned by what has happened to her and to use every effort to save her from worse happening. Even the law tries in its sterile way to help first offenders. You may accuse me of exaggeration, but I repeat that a human soul is at stake. If you try to make her go into a home now, she won't go. If you turn her out of the house, what chance has she got of being anything but embittered? You know what people are like in a place of this kind. You know the humiliations she will have to endure from the respectable, humiliations that will drive her into company of a looser sort. Vicar, you are not a hard man. Do exercise your imagination. You won't regret it, I'm sure of that. Do ring your bell now and tell Carrie that she can stay here for the time and consider herself free to do

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all she can to secure herself. It can't do any harm. It might do such a lot of good. *Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.*"

"Unfortunately for the aptness of your quotation, my dear Lidderdale, this girl doesn't evince the least symptom of penitence."

"Well, she's half-way to penitence," Mark said, "because she recognizes that she was to blame. And, anyway, when our Lord spoke those words, He spoke them to the Pharisees and scribes who grumbled because He was a man Who was receiving sinners and eating with them. I'm sorry to say what I must say, but there does not seem to me any possible kind of argument in favour of turning this girl out of the house that is not blasphemy against Jesus Christ."

The Vicar turned on Mark, pale with anger.

"I'm afraid, Lidderdale, that it will be impossible for you and me to work together any longer. I have been coming to that conclusion for some time. I'm afraid that I must ask you to resign your curacy at St. Luke's."

"Yes, I expect that it would be pleasanter for us both," Mark agreed. "But my resignation won't acquit you of fulfilling your duty toward Carrie."

A day or so after this the Vicar told Mark that he had secured Caroline's admission to a home for penitents. As Mark had expected, Carrie refused to go, whereupon she was told to leave the Vicarage that afternoon, much to the relief of Mrs. Middleditch.

"Although even now, if she will tell me the name of the man, I will keep her in my house until I have interviewed him and ascertained what he intends to do," the Vicar said.

But Carrie shut her mouth tight and began to pack her box.

Mark did not know what to do. He had an idea of getting Dorward to take her in for the time, and he was sure that Dorward would have done so without a moment's hesitation. But would it be quite fair? Then he thought of Mrs. Pluepott, who incidentally might be

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able to make a good guess at the name of the man. Mark hurried out to Oaktown to see if Mrs. Pluepott would take Carrie in for so long as there was a hope of her being able to persuade the man to marry her. Meanwhile he would write to Sister Esther Magdalene, so that if Carrie's hopes were not fulfilled she could be looked after. On his way out to Oaktown he overtook on the road Micha Chilcott, whose company he was glad to have, for Micha looked at life calmly and had not the contentious and omniscient radicalism of his brother Rehob. It came into Mark's head, while they were walking along the dusty August road together, to say something to his companion about Carrie. He knew that it would be idle to attempt to keep her condition a secret, for even if it were not obvious to the eye, Mark was sure that the moment she left the Vicarage Mrs. Middleditch would proclaim her sin aloud in the market-place and that the gossip would soon reach Oaktown.

"I want your advice, Micha," Mark said. "By the way, how's the new house getting on? I've not seen it for a month or more."

"It's not getting on at all. The old man has cut off all supplies. I don't think it'll ever be built now," Micha said.

"And what about your getting married? Is that postponed indefinitely?" Mark inquired.

"Oh, that was broken off a long time back. You're very much behind with Oaktown news, Mr. Lidderdale. No, my young lady didn't like the idea of the cow-house. The old man was right."

Mark looked sympathetic, and decided that this was the moment to talk about Carrie.

"I was saying that I wanted your advice, Micha. You remember Carrie? She works with us at the Vicarage, and was at our Christmas party?"

"Oh yes, I remember her well," Micha said.

"Well, I want your advice. She's in trouble, and I'm on my way now to ask Mrs. Pluepott if she will be kind enough to have her to stay with her for a time. Apparently the chap who's responsible is somebody in Oaktown. But Carrie absolutely declines to say who it

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is. I tried my best to persuade her to tell me his name, but she won't."

"It oughtn't be difficult to find out," Micha said.

"No, I don't think it will. But Carrie was so good about him. I mean, she insisted that it was as much her fault as his, and didn't, as so many girls do in similar circumstances, indulge in the antics of a heroine. I'd do anything to help the poor little girl. She's always been very kind to me and done so much to make me comfortable. Naturally, the Vicar is very much upset, and he told Carrie that unless she would say who it was she must leave the Vicarage. I can't help feeling that if only I could get hold of the chap I could make him see Carrie's fine qualities, and perhaps he'd realize that he was losing a good wife."

"He does realize it, Mr. Lidderdale," Micha said in such a matter-of-fact tone that Mark did not grasp for a moment that he was speaking for himself. "Where's Carrie now?"

"She's waiting till I get back from Mrs. Pluepott, so that in case Mrs. Pluepott won't have her to stay with her I can go to somebody else."

"When would you marry us?" Micha asked.

"As soon as possible."

"I'm ready when you are," Micha said.

Mark supposed that he ought to improve the occasion by a few well-chosen words about incontinence. But he felt too happy.

"Will you come back with me, Micha, and tell her so?"

"Well, I haven't fed the chickens," Micha said. "I'll come along in about an hour's time. I think you're a pretty good sort, Mr. Lidderdale. Thanks very much. Perhaps you wouldn't mind telling Carrie that it's all right?"

With this he hurried on to feed his chickens, and Mark walked so fast back to Galton that he was white with dust when he arrived.

"Carrie!" he shouted at the top of his voice in the Vicarage hall. "Carrie! You're engaged to be married. Come down and hear the wonderful news."

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While he stood there shouting, he had a vision of that starlit Christmas night when they had all walked up to Green Lanes; and in a radiance of golden candlelight he saw the Holy Child smiling.

But a voice that often whispered in his ear nowadays said: "Credulous fool, it's only a coincidence. It's sheer vanity to believe it to be the direct interposition of Almighty God. Vanity and egoism."

CHAPTER XI

ST. CUTHBERT'S, CHELSEA

WHEN Carrie was safely wed the Vicar suggested to Mark that perhaps the dispute between them might be forgotten in the happy issue of the affair, and that Mark might see his way to remain in Galton as his curate. But Mark felt that the dispute had exposed too much of their radical differences of opinion and intention, and that the bitterness to which both of them had given vent could not be set aside so easily. It was not as if this had been the first occasion of their not seeing eye to eye. It was the culmination of so many divergent opinions, uttered and unuttered. However, Mark agreed to stay on until the beginning of the new year, although his conscience warned him that he could do no good by remaining. Nor did he, at any rate so far as the cure of the parish was concerned; for, being above everything anxious not to imply the least disapproval of Shuter's way of doing things, he fell into a mechanical performance of his duties that allowed him too much leisure to brood morbidly upon the futility of religion. And how futile sometimes it did seem! Looking back in after years on that last four or five months at Galton, Mark gathered them together within the compass of the opening sentence of the Exhortation at Morning Prayer: *Dearly beloved brethren, the Scripture moveth us in sundry places to acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness.* And the words meant nothing. No such vain repetition had ever been uttered by the heathen, not even when the prophets of Baal called on his name from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. There was only one repetition still vainer, which was when the congregation of St. Luke's bleated back in answer: *Almighty and most merciful Father; we have erred, and strayed from thy*

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ways like lost sheep. For all it meant, the priest might have asked : *Baa-baa, black sheep, have you any wool?* And the congregation might have replied : *Yes, sir, yes, sir, three bags full.*

The worst which happened was that Mark, by staying on these months at St. Luke's, missed the opportunity of serving under Father Rowley, who died, prematurely worn out by grief, anxiety and disappointment, in the October before Mark was to have joined him.

Father Rowley was succeeded by Henry Snaith, who had been assistant priest at St. Agnes' and had given up a living to come and be assistant priest again at Holy Innocents'. Mark wrote at once to ask Snaith if he could join his staff after Christmas, and received the following reply :

Clergy House.
Church of The Holy Innocents,
Shoreditch.

December 4, 06.

My dear Lidderdale,

Before I agree to your coming to us, I should like to have a talk with you, and say in conversation what I should find it difficult to express in a letter. If you could manage to get up to town for an afternoon and come and see me, I should be much obliged, and we can then decide the question of your coming to us permanently. I had several talks with dear Rowley about you, and I already knew that in any event you were leaving Galton in the new year.

*Yours sincerely,
Henry Snaith.*

Mark was worried by this letter. It looked rather as if Snaith did not want him in Shoreditch. He wondered why. Rowley had never once suggested the slightest doubt of his being able to join him. And Snaith had always appeared to like him in the old days at St. Agnes'. This implied rebuff was most discouraging. But perhaps he was anticipating the worst without cause. The sooner he went up to town and relieved his mind, the better.

The Clergy House of Holy Innocents' stood in a gaunt

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street of tenement buildings, and was indeed itself a tenement building which Rowley had raised the money to buy soon after he arrived, and which he had already partially transformed to suit his own purposes, knocking rooms together and linking up corridors so that the whole place was as complicated an arrangement as the bones of the human body, and had indeed a kind of skeleton effect with its rattling windows and bleak whitewash and draughty landings like ribs all the way up to the skylights now drenched with the December rain.

Snaith's room, with its cupboards to which people kept coming and taking out some papers or putting back some papers, its sofa piled up with books, its row of half-smoked pipes on the mantelpiece (for the owner of it never had time to finish a pipe), and its window curtains of unequal lengths, was as comfortless a room as one could imagine. But it suited Snaith, with his black scrubby hair and black scrubby chin. In a well-furnished room he would have made one feel nervous, like a bottle of ink that is liable at any moment to upset itself over a beautiful cushion.

"Look here, Lidderdale," he began at once, "the point is this. I'm quite willing for you to come to us, but I advise you not to come. You've just had two years of a country town in the south of England, and I know what that means. You'll expect so much here that you'll be disappointed."

"I don't think that's likely," Mark said.

"Yes, it is," Snaith rapped out. "Because so far we've made a failure of Holy Innocents'."

"A failure?"

"A rank failure. Rowley knew it. That's really what killed him. 'Snaith,' he said a few days before he fell ill, 'I've had too much confidence in myself. It's not that I haven't trusted enough in our Blessed Lord. But I've always made too much a personal appeal. I've been humble with God, but I begin to wonder if I was humble enough with my fellow-men. Why can't I do here what I did at St. Agnes?' I told him that he was tired and therefore unduly despondent. 'Perhaps I'm tired out,' he said."

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"But you're staying on," Mark persisted. "If it's all such a failure, why are you staying on?"

"I'm not a young man like you. I'm proof—God forgive me for the boast—but I do believe that I really am proof against despondency. I expected a great deal from Rowley, but I don't expect a great deal from myself. And I shall feel content to achieve very much less than he would have been content to achieve."

Mark wondered if the Bishop of Silchester had anticipated the failure of Rowley's work in London.

"I'd rather you didn't come, to be quite frank," Snaith went on. "Even Rowley once or twice toward the end wondered to me if he ought to have you here."

"I don't know why I should be regarded as something so fragile," Mark said, feeling a little nettled by all this discussion of what he was capable of enduring. "I don't believe that the Bishop's fatherly care in sending me to Galton has done me so much good. But of course, if you feel in the very least doubtful about my ability to suit this parish, I shouldn't dream of arguing the point. Only I do wish that you'd object to me for this church rather than to this church for me."

"But I can assure you," said Snaith, "that we should welcome you here. I must insist that I am discouraging you on your own account."

Mark smiled a little wryly.

"I've brought this on myself," he said, "by one or two letters I wrote to Rowley. I shall have to cure myself of the letter-writing habit."

"I wish you wouldn't take it in this way." Snaith sighed. "I hate to raise these objections. But I know I'm right not to have anybody with me here who was familiar with St. Agnes' in its prime. I dare say my own selfishness is at the bottom of it. But look here, Moxon-Hughes, at St. Cuthbert's, Chelsea, wants an assistant-priest. I took it upon myself to suggest you. Why don't you go right away and see him this afternoon?"

Mark strode across Finsbury Square in a state of acute irritation. The more he thought of the way Snaith had turned him down, the more indignant he felt. It was a hard thing to say, but it did look as if his action had

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been dictated by nothing except self-consciousness. He feared comparisons with the dead priest and wished to avoid the association of anybody who had been familiar with his power. Mark turned out of the square into the crowds of Moorgate Street, trying to make up his mind to return at once to Galton. He could go to Wych after Christmas until he found another curacy. Why should he tamely consent to be foisted upon Moxon-Hughes? Gradually, however, with his jostled progress through the City, Mark lost his indignation against Snaith and told himself that, whatever the reason he had made it too difficult for him to come to Holy Innocents', he had at any rate been honest about it, and that in suggesting his name to Moxon-Hughes he had been actuated by good will. If in his letters to Rowley he himself had given an impression of being easily discouraged, and if Holy Innocents' had not got beyond the discouraging stage, Snaith was right to be chary of his services as assistant-priest. Mark turned into an Underground station and took a ticket to Sloane Square.

The Reverend John Quentin Beresford Moxon-Hughes had been vicar of St. Cuthbert's, Chelsea, for ten years, during which time he had written so many books and pamphlets to put forward his own particular point of view about the lines on which the Church of England ought to develop that, if he had not managed to secure an extensive adoption of his theories, he had at any rate made the Moxon-Hughes religion so well known that the most superficial student of ecclesiastical variety could scarcely have avoided at one time or another giving it his attention. He had managed with remarkable ingenuity to extract from the various uses of Sarum, Hereford, Lincoln and half a dozen more mediæval cathedrals what he called an irreducible minimum of consistency. This irreducible minimum he had thoroughly mixed with another irreducible minimum gathered from the uses of the various Caroline prelates. The compound he had flavoured with what appealed to him personally in the modern Roman use, and the result was offered, not as a pastiche by Moxon-Hughes, but as what without any possibility of argument was intended by the Reformers

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to be the religion of the Church of England. He claimed for his pastiche fearless logic, historical accuracy, liturgical infallibility, artistic form, romantic association, loyalty to the Book of Common Prayer, practical utility, and the certainty of its overawing bishops. If the authorities remonstrated with him for holding such a service as Creeping to the Cross on Good Friday, he remonstrated with them for allowing such vulgar innovations as the Stations of the Cross or the Devotion of the Quarant'ore. He was so eloquent in his denunciation of Oratorianism, Franciscanism, and Jesuitry, so severe on Benediction and the Forty Hours, and so much horrified by fiddle-back chasubles, cottas, and birettas that rash would have been the prelate who interfered with his revival of the boy bishop's sermon on St. Nicholas' Day or ventured to forbid him to reserve in an aumbry the Blessed Sacrament for the sick. Besides, his was the only church which those difficult people known generically as 'artists' were in the habit of attending, and not merely of attending, but actually of decorating with their own hands. Bold would be the bishop, rash and audacious the archdeacon, who should venture to object to picture or image or piece of furniture in St. Cuthbert's, Chelsea, for he would run the risk of being handed down to posterity as a gaitered Boötian, an aproned Philistine, who had not recognized in that lectern of handbeaten copper and handstamped leather an immortal work of art. When Moxon-Hughes stood up and thundered that the religion of St. Cuthbert's was a revival of the glories of mediæval art, any bishop crumpled up. He would never have been a bishop if he had not been susceptible to the force of public opinion, and Moxon-Hughes was something more than a personification of public opinion, Moxon-Hughes was a personification of Educated Public Opinion.

"Do you realize, my lord," he would say, "that at this moment we have no fewer than six separate guilds of artists and handicraftsmen at St. Cuthbert's all working together for the glory of God?"

"Have you indeed, Mr. Moxon-Hughes?"

"Am I to go to them and say, 'the Bishop of this

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tremendous diocese has no need of your services. You are not wanted in the English Church ' ? ”

“No, no, I assure you, Mr. Moxon-Hughes. That would be saying far more than I intended. You will remember that the question we were discussing was this service on the Feast of the Circumcision, in which I am informed you have introduced a dance before the altar by a number of little boys in vestments, the exact character of which I am not quite clear about. With every desire to look sympathetically at your work, I cannot, I really cannot, my dear Mr. Moxon-Hughes, accept such a performance as being in accordance with the spirit of the Book of Common Prayer.”

“But do you realize, my lord, that these vestments—tunics and appparelled albs, to give them their correct name—have been embroidered by a number of most distinguished lady artists? I wish your lordship would do us the honour to come and inspect one particularly magnificent specimen of devout labour—a tunic of glaucous silk powdered with red roses and blue fleurs-de-llys, and another of the same field with orphreys of gold and sown with peacocks, griffins, and sanguine cockatrices. And I may add that with astonishing accuracy this superb example is worn over a green alb.”

“I have no doubt about the beauty of the workmanship,” the Bishop would say, feeling by this time like a small boy that is being taken round a museum. “But my point, Mr. Moxon-Hughes, which I venture to think you have not even yet quite appreciated, is not so much what these little boys wear—and please believe me when I assure you how deeply gratified I am to hear of the beautiful work which is being done by these lady artists—no, Mr. Moxon-Hughes, not so much what they wear as what they do. In other words, it is this dancing in front of the altar which, without wishing in the very least, my dear Mr. Moxon-Hughes, to minimize the admirable work you are doing in Chelsea, does, I confess, perturb me quite considerably.”

“Do you realize, my lord,” Mr. Moxon-Hughes would retort without the least sign of penitence, “do you quite realize that these little boys whose beautiful dance you

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criticize have been specially taught by Lady Diana Lee-Metford, who, as your lordship must be very well aware, is supreme, not only as an amateur dancer of the classical school, but even among professionals has scarcely a rival? However," and here Mr. Moxon-Hughes would assume an air of urbane martyrdom, "if your lordship objects to this dancing before the altar on the old Feast of Fools, I am prepared to submit instantly to your lordship's ruling."

"I appreciate that very much, Mr. Moxon-Hughes," the Bishop might reply, for he would be so grateful for the deference to episcopal authority that he would say not a word about the boy bishop on St. Nicholas' Day or the pilgrimage that Moxon-Hughes had led to the shrine of St. Thomas à Becket, which had provoked such an acrimonious letter in *The Times* from the Dean of Canterbury. In fact, he would not make another demand upon Moxon-Hughes' obedience, though he might venture, when Moxon-Hughes was leaving, to express an earnest hope that he would think twice—yes, twice—before shattering the Protestant serenity of the diocese of Durham by conducting a similar pilgrimage next year to the shrine of St. Cuthbert.

"Would your lordship object to our visiting the shrine of St. Thomas de Cantilupe at Hereford?"

"Oh, not Hereford, Mr. Moxon-Hughes, please! You seem to delight in choosing such unsuitable cathedrals. I am sure that anything in the nature of a pilgrimage would pain the Bishop of Hereford extremely."

Mark was one of Moxon-Hughes' assistant-priests for nearly two years, toward the end of which time he wrote the following letter to the Rector of Wych-on-the-Wold:

155, Beaufort Street,
Chelsea,
Sept. 2, 1908.

My dear Rector,

I was most deeply disappointed that I could not get down to Wych for a fortnight or three weeks this August, but I did not come for two reasons. I had more or less made up my mind to leave St. Cuthbert's, and I

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did not want in talking out my resolution with you to let myself fall once more into the state of indecision in which I have been living all this year; and, secondly, if I was going to leave here this autumn, it did not seem fair to take a holiday during the summer.

The immediate reason of my leaving was a meeting with that stormy petrel, Andrew Hett, who has been restored more or less to episcopal favour, and is now senior assistant-priest under Whitmore at St. Chad's, Pimlico. You perhaps remember that he was the har-binger of my decision to leave the O.S.G. He used no persuasion, but it fell to my lot to entertain him while Moxon-Hughes was away on his honeymoon, and when he was preaching a week-day course of sermons at St. Cuthbert's. The result was that in his own forcible way he voiced a good many criticisms I had been making to myself for some time past, criticisms that I had never made to you in writing, because I did not want to encourage a discontented and roving spirit in myself. Perhaps Andrew Hett's expressed contempt of what I've heard called the "practical Pre-Raphaelitism and mundane mediævalism" of St. Cuthbert's would not have made me hand in my resignation unless I had been assured by him that not only should I be happier under Whitmore, but that I was the very person they wanted at St. Chad's.

Whether it is the reaction against the exaggerated Sarum of St. Cuthbert's, or whether it is the spectacle of our blatant congregationalism here I don't know—probably a mixture of both—but I've had a bad attack of Roman fever lately. Nothing to worry about for the moment, for I can assure you that I'm quite convalescent. Still, my temperature was high while it lasted, and I daresay that I've not had my last attack by any means. Moxon-Hughes' marriage was not exactly a febrifuge. I don't object to married priests, but I do strongly object to their nuptials. Perhaps the Orthodox Church takes the wisest course in denying them promotion or preferment. One feels that the obscure country parson is justifiably married; but when a priest like Moxon-Hughes, who lives by advertisement, indulges in an immense artistic wedding, I feel there is something undignified and

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almost unpleasant about it. However, I daresay that I should not have felt like this about it if I had not already begun to feel that, whatever there was to be said for the utility of the St. Cuthbert's religion, it did not suit me.

My chief objection to our system here has always been the atmosphere of the theatrical performance that our services emit, and not merely of theatrical performances, but of those dreadfully self-conscious performances which indicate an avowed determination to raise the standard of dramatic art. We seem to be saying all the time, "Yes, the Catholic revival in England has not paid enough attention to Art, but we are different." At St. Cuthbert's we think of Art first of all. Our chief aim is to restore Beauty to Religious Life. I'm not saying that we have neglected morality or spiritual fervour, but we do judge everything and everybody by æsthetic standards. When I think of the private lives of some of the people who have helped to make St. Cuthbert's the beautiful thing it is, I sometimes ask myself if we haven't accepted the paintings and sculpture and carving in the way that a restaurant keeper allows painters to decorate the walls of his restaurant instead of paying his bill. With all that these artistic people have done for Moxon-Hughes, I can't help feeling that they are still as deeply in debt to Almighty God as they ever were. Our congregation here is too confoundedly "interesting." It's like a first-night at a fashionable theatre. Our pews are thronged by minor celebrities, and whenever Moxon-Hughes goes up the steps of the marble pulpit, I feel that a distinguished actor-manager is thanking his kind friends in front for the cordial reception they have given to our little service. It's all "such great fun," or it's "rather jolly," with an intolerable drawl of the "rather." Or it's "quite pleasing," with an infernal complacency over that affected participle.

And just as we've made Art the handmaid of Religion, to use Moxon-Hughes' phrase, though I should have been less mediæval and called her a lady's-maid, so, to use my phrase this time, we are trying to make Religion the governess of Politics. One of the conspicuous tendencies of the time in which we are living is the way we all of us, whatever our political creed, try to appease that fierce

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dragon of Revolution which every day draws a little nearer. A man might as well try to stop a pack of hungry wolves with the breast-bone of a chicken. The Tories are Tory Democrats. The Liberals hope for an alliance with Labour, and try to claim that Lib. and Lab. are abbreviations that by their very similarity show the similarity of what they stand for. Every day the Labour party gains another recruit from the Intelligenza, not because the Intelligenza really believes in the fitness of Labour to govern, but because the Intelligenza has enough intelligence to be in with the winning side before it is too obviously the winner. And alas, this is the spirit of the Christian Socialism with which the Moxon-Hughes religion is identified. One of Moxon-Hughes' chief holds over the leaders of the English Church is the way he exhibits the Red Flag as the standard of the Lamb of God. The bishops feel that it is worth while winking at some of M.-H.'s eccentricities of ceremonial, if thereby the social revolutionaries will be kept in sympathy with the Church.

For a long time I enjoyed myself thoroughly here. I was intoxicated by the atmosphere of free discussion. I revelled in being able to voice my opinions without being regarded as a dangerous lunatic. I deluded myself into believing that we really were converting England to Catholicism. Every new pre-reformation form and ceremony and service that we were able to revive successfully filled me with enthusiasm for the future. Above all, Moxon-Hughes' conception of the English Church did seem profoundly logical. We were a National Church. The impulse behind the reformation was the impulse of the English to express their nationality, just as a similar impulse actuated the sea-dogs of Queen Elizabeth to harry Philip of Spain. The superficial notion in both cases might appear to be plunder, but the material gain was in both cases merely an incident.

And then it gradually began to dawn on me that we were acting, and that the main inspiration of our most magnificent productions was a desire to be accurate, if possible not at the expense of beauty, and artistic, if possible without involving our accuracy. We were so

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much afraid of an unconsidered anachronism creeping in to our services that we were blind to the glaring truth that the whole of our system of worship was one vast anachronism, that, in fact, it was just the Moxon-Hughes religion owing whatever vitality it possessed to the eclectic skill of Moxon-Hughes himself. I think that I first realized this clearly in the course of a discussion about Benediction.

"Benediction!" M.-H. smiled in his most Pooh-Bah manner. "My dear boy, do you know what is the earliest date that the compilers of the New English Dictionary find for an example of the use of the word in English? 1812! Before 1812 the word is not found in the English language; though I admit that liturgical research has apparently discovered an allusion to the service's being held in the time of Charles I, by the Romans, of course. No, no, the cult of Benediction is Oratorianism at its worst. We don't want Benediction in the English Church. Our object is to restore the Holy Mass to its pristine glory, to make it what it was in the middle ages, the hearth and centre of English life. And not merely English religious life, mark you, but of English social life. Benediction, as any honest Roman will tell you, is becoming a dangerous competitor. I should never be surprised to read a Papal encyclical warning Catholics—Roman Catholics—against the danger of substituting Benediction for Mass."

I pointed out that there could be no need of an encyclical so long as it remained a mortal sin for the faithful not to hear Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of obligation. I argued that nothing in the history of humanity had given such proof of common sense as the Roman Church, and that if Benediction was encouraged it must be that Benediction had been found a valuable aid to religious observance.

"It's a pretty service," said M.-H., becoming more than ever like Pooh-Bah as he spoke. "Yes, it's undeniably pretty, but it's a flimsy prettiness, my dear boy. It encourages feminine sentimentality. And it's un-English."

"In what way un-English?" I persisted. "If you

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mean that it does not appeal to English people, that would certainly be an argument against its introduction generally; but if you simply mean that it wasn't invented in England, I might as well argue that because Beethoven's symphonies were not written in England we ought not to encourage their performance. Surely your object in restoring the lost beauties of the Catholic religion to the English people is to bring them nearer to God. You're not founding a museum in which people may study the habits of bygone generations of Englishmen."

Moxon-Hughes loves an argument like this with all his heart, and I could see that he was in two minds whether he should not try to sustain the paradox that, until modern English people knew how their ancestors drew near to God with the forms and ceremonies he was trying to restore to them, they would not draw near to God by any kind of modern devotion. If he had tried to sustain this point of view, I was ready to retort that we had no proof whatever that people in the middle ages were any nearer to God than people of to-day. However, he contented himself with repeating that he thought Benediction was a bad substitute for Mass.

I replied that I was sure that, if the Romans suspected this, they would have given up Benediction long ago. I said that the remoteness of God was more powerful than anything else in people's imagination as a cause of unbelief. Benediction helped humanity to know God. Benediction got people into the habit of wanting God, and the more people wanted God, the nearer they must draw to God. To me, as I said, it seemed obvious. Moxon-Hughes replied that while, of course, people must draw near to God, they must draw near to Him in the right way. And then I knew that he did not really love human beings, which seemed to me to make all effort at St. Cuthbert's a waste of time and money and energy.

In fact, I was up against the individualism and congregationalism of English worship, and I began to ask myself if I ought to remain in a Church where it was possible to argue about the best way of bringing people to God. From the moment I was attacked by Roman fever it was clear that I should find myself criticising the

St. Cuthbert's, Chelsea

Moxon-Hughes religion; for one of the great disadvantages of the Church of England is that it appears to be whatever church one is attached to at the moment. Perhaps Snaith was being almost more than subtle when he sent me here. He may have thought that by going to Holy Innocents' and finding Rowley's religion, which I had at one time accepted as THE religion of the Church of England, a failure in Shoreditch, I should be driven out of the Church of England altogether. He may have said to himself that nobody in his senses could possibly identify the Church of England with the Moxon-Hughes religion, and that if I only revolted against that I should not be doing myself much harm. It certainly is true that after I had talked to Andrew Hett about St. Chad's, Pimlico, my temperature subsided, and I am now looking forward immensely to a simpler expression of Catholic Christianity than I find here. I am not sorry that I came here, because I have met a number of interesting people and heard a lot of interesting talk. I feel more able to hold my own in the world and with the world than I did. Perhaps I've lost a good deal of provincialism. And one is bound to have a certain snobbish satisfaction in doing that. Not that I think I ought to hail Chelsea as metropolitan, for with all its coteries it seems much the most provincial part of London.

I've read through this unending letter, and I've been asking myself if I am doing right to leave here. The answer is in the affirmative. I am sure that I am right.

I propose myself at Wych sometime during the first week of October, and I shall be able to stay at least a fortnight if you can put me up. Love to everybody,

*Yours ever,
M. L.*

CHAPTER XII

ST. CHAD'S, PIMLICO

ST. CHAD'S was a smoky edifice built of yellow bricks in the Byzantine manner associated from the laying of the foundation-stone with the Catholic revival in the Church of England. It was now a much poorer district than when, some forty years ago, it had been created a separate parish. Those grey Pimlico streets had been steadily peeling without and decaying within ever since, and each new year that arrived found another of them nearer to the status of the slum. Besides those habitations of the very poor, there was in the immediate environment of Victoria Station, as there is in the immediate environment of any great London terminus, a raffish neighbourhood that existed as a repository of evil and a clearing-house for vice. Any terminus quickly creates a festering sore. Such a comparatively fresh wound as the Great Central terminus at Marylebone has set up a gangrene of manners and morals in the neighbourhood.

Where the parish of St. Chad's included a portion of Grosvenor Road there were still several squares and terraces in the vicinity lived in by people sufficiently enamoured of respectability to print South Belgravia instead of Pimlico on their note-paper. But these people did not seem to belong to the parish, and indeed most of them worshipped at a church farther west, to attend a service at which they were not compelled to penetrate into the unsavoury hinterland of St. Chad's.

The Vicar, Charles Whitmore, reminded Mark of Moxon-Hughes in appearance; but though tall and heavily built, he was not imposing like Moxon-Hughes, and he had no ambition to advertise himself or his church. He was a genial and cultured man with a strong sense of humour and a great deal of simple piety. The senior

St. Chad's, Pimlico

curate, Andrew Hett, was the dominant personality. He had been a beneficed priest before he had quarrelled with the Bishop of Ipswich and resigned his living, and it was obvious that his influence with the Vicar was paramount. Unfortunately he was not popular among the parishioners, towards whom he always adopted an unpleasantly domineering manner, to which he added several extremely high-handed actions. The second curate was Chator, who was so good as sometimes to be nearly tiresome. He had certainly enjoyed a sense of humour once upon a time, but Mark decided that he had tried to get rid of it with all the other human passions that required quelling. He had a face like a sheep, light hazel eyes like very weak tea, and a spluttering way of talking; but he was wonderful with the poor people, in whom his simplicity, which sometimes verged on imbecility, roused a desire to protect him and thus secured him their deep affection. The other curate, Nigel Stewart, was leaving at Christmas to go to Mortemer, at St. Cyprian's, South Kensington. Mark was sorry to hear this, for he found Stewart the most attractive young priest he had met hitherto. He was one of those people whom everybody likes and whose universal popularity always creates a prejudice against him beforehand; but, however much prejudiced a stranger might be, Stewart never failed to add him to the long list of his friends, and to this rule Mark was no exception. Stewart was handsome in a seraphic way and had no more insincerity than the bare minimum that every popular young man must have in order to be popular. Perhaps he may not have been quite so fond of you as he seemed when he took your arm and asked your advice, but whenever you heard that he had mentioned your name it was always with affection, and so in the end you began to believe that perhaps he really was every bit as fond of you as he pretended to be. On the whole Mark found the Clergy House in Balm Street, Pimlico, as sympathetic an environment as any in which he had been placed. Chator, like himself, was a literate, so that he did not feel himself out of it with the others, who were all Oxford men. Instead of finding their manner tiresome and affected, as he might have done had

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he been the only priest without a degree, Mark enjoyed it and thought that it added a spice to the atmosphere of the Clergy House. Another interest that he and Chator had in common was that of both having been for some time in an Anglican monastery. Chator's experience had been a happier one than his own, because he had been with the Benedictines of Clere.

"Oh, they're splendid, they're splendid, my dear fellow. Very strict. Everything done very well indeed. Nothing High Church at all. But I had no vocation. No vocation at all. Couldn't stand the silence. It had a terrible effect on me. I was continually being tempted. Dreadful thoughts! I actually used to get pinched sometimes by devils."

Mark roared with laughter at this.

"It's perfectly true, my dear fellow. I'm not inventing anything. Pinched! Violently pinched! I really was. The silence got on my nerves till at last I simply could not stand it. Dom Cuthbert was awfully kind. He advised me to leave. He considered that I had a vocation for the active life. I should never have made a good contemplative. The moment I begin to contemplate I'm finished. Even when I'm saying the Rosary I have to be jolly careful. The most appalling thoughts get between me and the Mysteries."

Mark laughed once more.

"No, it really is not a laughing matter. You think I'm exaggerating, but I assure you, my dear fellow, nobody like you can possibly have any idea of the atrocious visions some souls are exposed to."

"I should try bromide," Mark suggested.

Chator shook his head.

"You're a sarcastic chap, Lidderdale. I know you think I'm an awful ass to talk like this. But if I could preach like you, I tell you I'd have a congregation in fits. I would really. Talk about Dante's Inferno! Well, I can assure you that I've seen Hell with my own eyes. Splendid attendance at the children's Mass yesterday! I think we're going steadily ahead all the time."

Whereupon Chator retired, singing at the top of his voice :

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O praise the Lord, all ye heathen, praise Him, all ye nations,

For His merciful kindness is ever more and more towards us: and the truth of the Lord endureth for ever. Praise the Lord.

When Mark got to know Andrew Hett better, he discovered that his domineering and intransigent manner was a manner he assumed not so much against the rest of humanity as against his own soul. Mark divined that he was continually tormented by a philosophic nihilism of faith and morals, almost it seemed sometimes of existence itself. The way in which he would insist upon the importance of some minor ceremony always gave Mark an impression that he was trying to persuade himself of its importance in order that the great mysteries of the Christian Faith should rest secure behind such apparently negligible defences. He would throw himself into a rage if anybody dared to impugn the perfect accuracy of a popular life of St. Filomena. According to Hett, any childish story of the saints, reek though it might of the gossip of a convent parlour, was to be accepted of faith. One was given to understand that, if the dead body of St. Filomena did not thump the coachman to express her disapproval of the direction in which he was taking her bones, one might as well abandon the Incarnation right away. Sometimes when Mark was sitting in his room and watching Hett plunged so deep in a low wicker chair that his long thin legs thrust out before him were on a level with his head, watching his pale face with upslanting red eyebrows and red-rimmed eyes, he would have a sudden horror that Hett's personality would presently dissolve and take on an aspect sheerly diabolic. Chator might splutter about his appalling thoughts, but here was a man who really was haunted by evil, whose eyes stared in terror at the shadow of damnation. One evening Hett talked about Pico della Mirandola and of the wonderful lives that were made possible by the Renaissance.

"I always think that one of the great tragedies of history is that Frederick of Hohenstaufen (who, by the way, was a cousin of St. Thomas Aquinas, which few remember) never knew the environment for which he was

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suited. He was born so many years too soon, and I am born so many years too late. I hate this thin-faced time of ours, Lidderdale. I hate it. If one had denied Christ then, one would have denied Him for something worth while in life. It would have been worth doing it merely for the Greek Anthology. But now people deny Christ for steam-engines and bacteria and geological primers. Why do I keep that infernal statuette on my mantel-piece?" he cried, leaping up from his chair and seizing a terra-cotta cast of the Naples Narcissus, which he smashed to pieces on the fender.

Mark felt embarrassed by his violence, and he could think of no comment that would not seem ridiculous.

"Suppose that there is nothing!" Hett went on. "God, what a waste of blood and nerves and sinews! Eternal oblivion would then be a mercy indeed, for otherwise not even our own Hell could hold such torments as the endless regret one would feel for wasting one's life on earth. Which do you think is more poignant—regret for what one has not done, or remorse for what one has? I think regret. *De te fabula*, as Browning quotes to end *The Statue and the Bust*."

The next day, when Mark entered Hett's room to speak to him about some parish matter, he saw that the broken Narcissus had been replaced by a small plaster cast of the Immaculate Conception painted with blue and white and cheap gilt.

"There's not going to be any nonsense this year over the eighth of December," Hett said. "We are going openly to keep the feast as the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, a double of the first class with octave. Last year Whitmore was shy of the adjective, but even by the detestable standard of the English Calendar I cannot imagine that any other conception except an immaculate conception is intended to be commemorated. Why celebrate an ordinary conception?"

"Moxon-Hughes always kept the Immaculate Conception openly," Mark said. "His argument was that the doctrine first became popular in England with the help of the Oxford Franciscans and was opposed by the Paris Dominicans."

St. Chad's, Pimlico

Hett had his way, as usual, and the Feast of the Immaculate Conception was celebrated that year at St. Chad's, Pimlico, with much splendour.

"I fink it'll make ve old Bishop sit up when he hears about it," said Cumberbatch, sucking his huge moustache with relish.

Cumberbatch, the walrus-faced ceremoniarus, could not pronounce 'th.' Although he lived as far away from Pimlico as Haverstock Hill, Cumberbatch considered himself, and was considered by everybody else, the chief lay figure of St. Chad's. How he managed to attend to his business in the City, assist at every important function at a church in Pimlico, and live at the top of Haverstock Hill was a mystery.

"It's the energy of matter," Hett used to say.

Occasionally Cumberbatch was put up at the Clergy House, but so seldom that his unfailing attendance really did border on the miraculous. He was warden of the Guild of St. Aloysius for servers at the altar. How Moxon-Hughes would have disapproved of such a saintly patron, Mark used to think. Cumberbatch ran this guild with much competence, for the boys were fond of him and did not mind how many rehearsals he gave them before an important feast. Every year he took the whole guild away to Broadstairs for a fortnight, making himself responsible for the necessary funds, though whether these came out of his own pocket or were collected on Haverstock Hill, nobody knew. Mark suggested that Cumberbatch lived a double life (his energy would have run even to that) and addressed missionary teas on Haverstock Hill, extracting from Protestant old ladies money to provide the heathen with Bibles and trousers, but using their contributions to take the guild of St. Aloysius to Broadstairs every August.

Before Cumberbatch was converted to Catholicism and thenceforth devoted himself to master all the great Roman authorities upon rites and ceremonies, he had been a spiritualist. Nothing diverted Mark more than when, after supper on Sunday evenings, Cumberbatch could be persuaded to hold forth about his experiences with mediums.

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"Vough it's all very well to laugh," he used to say. "But it's not just a joke, I can assure you. Of course vere's a certain amount of fraud, but most of it is ve work of unclean spirits. Vere's no credit to me in becoming a Carfolic. I saw too much not to believe. But blessed are vey which have not seen and yet have believed. Take transubstantiation, for instance. Well, if you've seen, as I've seen, ve substance of a material object when ve accidents weren't vere, it's clear vat ve schoolmen knew what vey were talking about. Oh, vere's no doubt about it. By ve way, Faver Whitmore, are you going to let us have Benediction every Sunday now? I fink it's time we did, you know. We've done nuffing to worry ve old Bishop for ages now. I fink he ought to be stirred up again soon. Oh, yes, and by ve way, Faver Whitmore, I wish you'd say somefing to Mrs. Walker. I asked her if ve Guild of St. Monica was getting on wiv Our Blessed Lady's dress for ve Crib, and she swears she's heard nuffing about it. I fought it was decided vat we were going to dress all ve images in future. I mean to say, vis is just ve parish for a bit of Suvvern Italy, don't you know. I'm sure ve people 'ud like it frightfully and it would give ve old Bishop ve jimjams. We oughtn't to stand still, you know."

"Now that's enough, Cumberbatch," the Vicar laughed. "Between you and Father Hett I don't know where I shall end."

"Well, you know, we've got ve name now at St. Chad's for giving a lead to ve rest. Vey're only waiting at St. Mary Magdalene's, Westminster, to see how ve auctorities take our Sunday Benediction to start vem-selves. We mustn't let vem down. Oh, and by the way, Faver Whitmore, it's quite decided, isn't it, vat we carry our dear old patron round ve parish at ve patronal festival? I'm asking about it a few weeks ahead, because I want to fink out ve details of ve procession. It's a pity ve dear old man's day falls so early in ve year, just when flowers are so blessed expensive. However, I fink I'll be able to raise a few baskets of narcissus to strew before ve dear old chap. I hope we'll get ve Bishop of Jubaland to sing episcopal High Mass. I fink ve people

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will appreciate it if he trots round ve parish in full canonicals in front of our dear old Saint."

"Don't you think you could manage a miracle, Cumberbatch?" Mark suggested. "Surely some of your spiritualistic friends would help. Anything might happen if Blessed Chad would start playing tambourines above the Bishop's bed, or couldn't something be managed on the lines of Balaam's ass, using the Bishop's motor-car to indicate the modernism of the miracle?"

"Ah, you're pulling my leg, Faver Lidderdale. But I dare say we shall have a miracle when we least expect it. Why, he may convert Canon Henley Henderson to Christianity."

"No, I think that's too steep a task even for Blessed Chad," said Nigel Stewart, who had come over from South Kensington to preach in Pimlico this Sunday evening. "The spread of the gospel in Mercia was child's play compared with what you're asking him to do now."

"Yes, it would take the Prince of the Apostles himself to tackle Henley Henderson," Mark said. "Or, at any rate, St. Paul."

Chator was in ecstasies of mirth during all this.

"My dear Lidderdale," Hett protested, "you surely don't imagine that Blessed Peter would recognize a Pauline conversion? Never! He'd slam the gates of Heaven in his face."

Chator was by now in danger of falling under the table, such was the state of acute risibility to which he had been reduced.

"Well," said Cumberbatch, "I suppose I ought to be toddling back to Haverstock Hill."

"Aren't you going to stay for Compline?"

"Well, if I do, it'll mean vat I shall miss my last bus up. Still, never mind. I don't like to miss Compline."

Every Sunday evening about this time Cumberbatch supposed that he ought to be toddling back to Haverstock Hill; and every Sunday he stayed behind for Compline, missed that last bus, and walked all the way up. As Mark said, however ridiculous Cumberbatch might appear outwardly with his ritualistic schemes and projects and

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his delight in distressing bishops, he never hesitated to sacrifice his own comfort to his devotion, and for that everything could be forgiven him.

There was nothing that Mark enjoyed with such peculiar intimacy as this Compline of Sunday. It would have been a long and tiring and perhaps discouraging day. He might have said Mass at six o'clock and again at half-past nine. He might have been deacon at High Mass, taken the Sunday school at three, said the Rosary at four, preached at Vespers, and helped to amuse the large band of workers that always sat down to supper every Sunday night in the refectory of the Clergy House; but as soon as they all left the sacristy and walked silently through the dark church, led by the blue lamp glimmering before the tabernacle in the Lady Chapel whither they were bound, a Divine refreshment was poured out upon his spirit. It was the use at St. Chad's to say Compline by candlelight, and thus preserve the mystery of night that filled the not very beautiful church. Sitting in his stall during the five minutes of silent meditation that preceded the recitation of the Office, Mark would re-live the long day. He would be at the altar saying Mass in the bleak gaslight of a winter's morning in an almost empty church; he would be feeling discouraged and isolated until he turned to communicate the faithful. There would not be many of them, but their piety and fervour would stand out in strange relief against the ugliness of the yellow brick church. They would nearly all be women; and, when they knelt to receive the Body and Blood of their Saviour, they would put Mark in mind of those first holy women that might perhaps be revered before even the disciples as the earliest Christians. Certainly not one of them ever failed her Lord and her God even as much as Peter or Thomas failed Him, even by pushing herself forward as did James or John, and least of all by betraying Him like Judas. And in this ugly modern church grimed with the smoke of London these women that came so early in the morning stood out against the background of the City's myriads as perhaps on Calvary the pallid, tear-stained faces of those other women stood out against the

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indifferent or hostile mob. The next hours would be spent with the breviary, often in catching up neglected offices of the week before. And then there would be the children's Mass. Even in this silence the clatter of their footsteps seemed audible if one listened, their footsteps and the volume of their heavy cockney breathing and their sibilant cockney singing. High Mass would be shrouded in incense, and Mark would feel the weight of his dalmatic again and wonder if he had struck the right note when he began to chant the Gospel. More footsteps. More breathing. Shrill voices answering questions and a waving of skinny arms; but Sunday School had been a success. The children had laughed several times without any bashfulness. Even one or two of the teachers had tittered. At the end one had not felt that it had been a failure. Not very many grown-up people for the Rosary. It was not a habit yet in St. Chad's. It was still a novelty, and grown-up people were self-conscious about it. But the children liked it, and the fruit would be gathered in years to come. It really would be a habit in another ten years. How good the crumpets had been at tea. Just right, and all crumpets . . . no muffins. Why did people ever have muffins? It was like the problem of evil, and a part of the eternal rhythm—good and evil, night and day, male and female, muffins and crumpets. Or was he being Manichean? Had he preached well? Looking back at the sermon, Mark remembered how much aware he had been of the weariness of the congregation. It was not that he had preached dully, but that his listeners were already tired. They were tired of life and of London. They had come in out of the raw fog for an hour of warmth and music, and they were glad to nod while the sermon was being preached, glad to drowse for awhile and forget the fatigue and the dirt and the worry and the uncertainty of their lives. Next time he preached at Vespers he should take that most familiar of all texts. *Come unto me, all ye that labour*—that was the word in the A.V., not *travail*, and the people would understand it better. *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* If only he could stir them from their

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apathy for one moment so that they would look up and behold their Lord and their God. Mark prayed for such eloquence. And what a jolly supper it had been and how priceless Cumberbatch was and . . .

V. Turn us, O God our Saviour,

R. And let Thine anger cease from us.

Mark gave his attention to the Office, to the Psalms *Cum invocarem* and *In Te, Domine, speravi* and *Qui habitat*.

He shall defend them under His Wings, and thou shalt be safe under His Feathers: His faithfulness and truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

Thou shalt not be afraid for any terror by night: nor for the arrow that flieth by day;

For the pestilence that walketh in darkness: nor for the sickness that destroyeth in the noon-day.

What a sensation of intimacy with God these words evoked! The terror of the London night that the souls of children and of simple folk apprehended was always there, even though an increasing knowledge of the world might supply a false security. Yes, the terror was still there, and none could say this psalm without a realization of humanity's dependence upon the Wings and Feathers of God. Without Him all men should be as timorous as the small birds of the air.

Thou shalt go upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou tread under thy feet.

The shadows of the church pressed down upon the candlelight, illuminating the little group that seemed to have taken refuge there. The image of the Blessed Virgin with hands clasped to Heaven in supplication for mankind seemed to be herself one of this band of worshippers and to be the leader of their orisons.

Behold now, praise the Lord: all ye servants of the Lord;

Ye that by night stand in the house of the Lord: even in the courts of the house of our God,

Lift up your hands in the sanctuary: and praise the Lord.

It surely availed something that they should be here by night in the house of the Lord, here in His very

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Presence upon the altar. It was marvellous that mere walls of begrimed yellow bricks should serve as a pavilion for the Lamb of God, where He might abide notwithstanding the lust and drunkenness and blasphemy without. This poor London church contained Infinity, and the words here spoken were Eternity.

V. Keep me as the apple of an eye.

R. Hide me under the shadow of Thy Wings.

Mark wished that he could go out now into the streets and bring in those lost shapes of men and women that wandered miserably through the raw fog separated from God by no more than a few courses of yellow bricks. He had never said the *Confiteor* with such a profound consciousness of his own spiritual indolence, and he had never listened to the words of absolution with such determination to deserve their mercy.

CHAPTER XIII

WHOSE SINS

A NEW element was added to Mark's duties when he came to St. Chad's, Pimlico, which was the confessional. Nobody ever came to confession at Galton, or at any rate those that did found Shuter's ghostly aid all that they required. Moxon-Hughes, when he was told that Mark had not yet heard any confessions, suggested that it would be wiser for him to wait until he was a year or two older, a postponement for which he was grateful because on the human side this aspect of his priestly office was more heavily weighted with responsibility than any other.

At St. Chad's every priest was allowed to have his own special penitents; but, generally speaking, and as far as it was possible to control individual preferences, the Vicar took the women and girls, Hett the men, and Chator the boys. It was decided that this rough grouping should not be altered, and that Mark should at certain times during the week sit in the confessional-box at the disposal of whatever sick souls should come to him to be healed by God. Until Hett's arrival, confessional-boxes had not been used at St. Chad's; the Glastonbury chair and prie-dieu had served there, as they serve in most English churches. So far, no Protestant busybodies had sniffed them out, and gratified their obscene imaginations by spilling ink on letters to the Bishop; but Mark found that the possibility of such an occurrence increased the strain of his task.

"Of course, we don't have to put up with the foulness against which our predecessors had to contend," he said to Hett one day. "Still, ever since that row about *The Priest in Absolution*, one always dreads some such horrible attack as that being made. I wonder how many

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Anglicans have had their first grave doubts about their position when sitting in the box."

Hett looked at Mark sharply for a moment.

"You'll soon get over that," he said. "It's usually a strain when one first begins to hear confessions."

"I think it will always be a strain to me," Mark replied. "I can't bear the absence of matter-of-factness about confession in the Establishment. For instance, when the Bishop wrote to me before my ordination, he asked at the end of his letter if there was anything I wished to consult him about in private. Why couldn't he have written 'do you want me to hear your confession?' I don't know; it makes the whole thing unpleasant somehow. It's like the horrid euphemisms of nurses and governesses for the natural needs of the body. I suppose it is the prurient bashfulness of the Anglo-Saxon character that is to blame; and yet I don't know; it was perhaps rather that the Anglo-Saxon character responded to Protestant individualism more readily than the Latin and the Kelt."

"The Kelt has responded with disastrous results in Wales and Cornwall, and I should be inclined to add, though I'm speaking without first-hand experience, in Scotland," said Hett. "And we surely ought to consider it one of Almighty God's major mercies that he did not allow the whole of Ireland to turn Protestant. What an appalling country it would have been!"

"It's a superficial judgment, of course," said Mark, "to say that Protestantism was built up on the lechery of individuals, and yet when one seeks for a more profound explanation we can only substitute desire for lechery, though at its best I suppose we might use aspiration."

"Protestantism is a malady of the soul," said Hett. "What I am going to say may sound like a paradox, but I believe it to be a truth. Protestantism was begotten out of man's apprehension of mortality. From the moment that a life to come began to appear, with the progress of knowledge, a less certain prospect, the importance of the individual life in this world was enormously heightened. Such a doctrine as justification

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by faith alone was a cry of despair from souls that no longer regarded faith as their natural inheritance. Faith had been so easy for so many years, and now suddenly with the possibility of losing it man tried to keep it by proclaiming its worth not merely over everything else, but to the exclusion of everything else, so that you get the perfectly ludicrous conception of good works that the reformers evolved."

"But what do you think really marks the temperamental difference between a Catholic and a Protestant?" Mark asked. "I mean, of course, apart from any question of grace, and from any begging of the question by saying that one is true and the other false. It's conceivable, for instance, that one might talk of the Catholic temperament and the Protestant temperament in human beings who were not Christians. I should be inclined to say that Catholicism was Aristotelian, objective, realistic, classic, conservative, epic, and feminine; and that Protestantism was Platonic, subjective, idealistic, romantic, liberal, lyric, and masculine."

"Yes, on the whole I should agree with you," Hett said. "Though I think some of your antitheses are rather dim and cloudy about the edges, and I should prefer to say that Catholicism was all that you claim for it and all that you allow to Protestantism, but that Protestantism was only what you allow to it. Wouldn't you allow any masculinity to Catholicism, for instance?"

"No, I don't think I would," Mark said. "St. Paul perceived the inherent femininity of the Church, and we have followed him ever since."

"Yes, but that may have arisen from the Greek word's being feminine. We've lost so much with the loss of gender in our language."

"The original allotment of gender," Mark argued, "showed a perception of reality by early man which the complications of progress have done much to destroy. You might compare our modern insensitiveness to words with the deterioration of our sight and hearing and smell."

"But *ἐκκλησία* originally meant an Athenian assemblage that had been called forth," said Hett.

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"Precisely. And what could be more feminine than a crowd?" Mark retorted. "And presumably that feminine word was chosen for the Church of Christ with a keen sense of the Church's femininity. Protestantism is essentially an active and masculine principle. It is dynamic, but Catholicism is static. The strength of Catholicism is its weakest link; the strength of Protestantism is its strongest link. Another feminine characteristic of Catholicism is its adaptability. Compare Catholic missions with Protestant missions."

"Do you know what I'm wondering all the time you're talking?" Hett asked, with a crooked smile. "I'm wondering if the Establishment is bi-sexual, or whether it is merely neutral! Yes, I think I prefer the femininity of Rome, even if she really is the Scarlet Whore of the Apocalypse."

"All this arose," Mark said, "out of my observation that confession was treated in the Establishment too much as a spiritual excitement. Those were not my words, but that's what I meant. And perhaps the reason has nothing to do with pruriency or bashfulness, but is a sign of the importance to which our Protestant heaven raises the individual. I know that the other point of view might instance the five sparrows sold for two farthings and the numbered hairs of our head that show each of us to be of more value than many sparrows. But that is God's business. I think it's a mistake for us to count our own hairs. David got into trouble for taking a census of the people. I think we're looking for trouble when we take a census of our hairs. Yes, I like the feminine way the Roman Church regards mankind. 'They're all alike,' she seems to say. 'Let's do what we can for the brutes. Feed them and flatter them, but don't let's forget that we mustn't expect too much.' Don't you find it difficult, Hett, when you're hearing confessions not to cheapen the sins? Of course, at St. Chad's we don't get a great many of those very introspective sinners, but some of the young females are extremely tiresome. I do wish that Whitmore would make it a fixed rule that none of the young females in his parish should confess to the junior priests. What I

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find myself nearly doing sometimes is saying, 'Yes, yes. But please don't think you're the first young woman who has behaved in such a way. You *all* do. It's part of your make up. So don't stammer and gulp over it.' "

"Some of the self-consciousness may be in yourself," Hett said.

"Ah, yes, that hadn't struck me," Mark admitted. "Yes, I think you're right, Hett. Thanks very much. I'll remove that beam as soon as I can."

And in this he was successful, so that he was able within a short while to achieve the impersonality that the administration of the sacrament required, and yet at the same time as director to exercise an influence over his penitents that bore fruit in the perseverance with which they fought against temptation. At the same time, he was in no danger of fancying himself in a spiritual Harley Street. He was very much the general practitioner in his cure of souls; and if in this parish there existed complicated cases, they did not come his way.

One afternoon in early March soon after the patronal festival, Mark, after having listened for an hour to catalogues of minor domestic delinquencies, had come to the end of the time when he was on duty in the confessional and had left the box and was walking toward the sacristy, when he saw a man leave one of the chairs and make a move toward him as if he would speak to him. When Mark stopped to wait for him, he drew back and sat down again. Mark always dreaded the notion of playing spider to flies, particularly in the confessional, and this made him unwilling to encourage the stranger by asking him if he wanted anything. Yet his curiosity was roused by one who was quite unknown to him, and whose outward appearance did not at all suggest a penitent. In fact, with his protruding underjaw and big peaked cap held fumblingly in his hands and red kerchief tied round his neck, he looked like a young costermonger who had taken up with the Ring. Mark decided that his presence in the church had nothing to do with any desire to confess his sins, and, turning back, he asked what he wanted. At this the man rose clumsily, and, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, said in

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the hoarse voice of dwellers about the old marshes of the Thames :

"I had somefink I wanted to tell yer in private, mister."

"Do you mean you want to make your confession?" Mark asked.

"Yuss, I reckon that's jest abaht the size of it, mister. I've got somefink on my mind."

Mark led the way toward the box.

"Kneel there," he told him, pointing to the hassock in front of the grille, and went to take his seat within. Then a thought struck him.

"This is an English church," he said. "You understand that?"

The man once more wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and loosened the kerchief round his neck.

"What say, mister?" he asked, in evident perplexity.

"I thought that you might think it was a Roman Catholic church," Mark explained.

"Well, it looked to me like Smichael's, Plaistow, where I used to go to church and Faver Azlitt was in charge of a lads' club. Some on 'em used to say suffink abaht it being Roman Cartholic, but I never took no account of what none on 'em said. Faver Azlitt was allers on abaht Jesus Christ, and I used to confess what I done to him. And a blooming pity it was I ever give it up. Preps if I'd kep' on with church I mightn't be where I am now. And swelp me Gawd, mister, I'm in a bad way. How I heppened to come inside of this 'ere church was when I seed a copper staring at me very 'ard from the other side of the street. So I up and walks in, and when I were inside I got it into my 'ead as I must tell someone, and that's the bleeding truth, guvnor, if I was to swing for it."

He loosened his kerchief again and licked his lips with his tongue.

"That's all right," Mark said. "Kneel there. I know St. Michael's, Plaistow. Father Hazlitt died last year. He was a good man."

"You're right, mister. He were a good 'un, and no mistake. So 'e's slung his hook for good and all, 'as he?"

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I've thought times aht of number as how I'd like to go and have a talk with him again. But I never went somehow, and now 'e's gone. Yuss, he *were* a good 'un."

"Say the confession after me," Mark commanded, when this unusual penitent was on his knees. *I confess to Almighty God . . .*"

The stranger mumbled the words after Mark, and there was a silence.

"Of what do you accuse yourself since you last went to confession?" Mark asked, after a long pause.

"Well, I reckon I done abaht everyfink," said the penitent, after a raucous clearing of his throat. "Yuss, I reckon you can put it down as I done whatever any feller could do, an' a bit more."

"That's rather too vague," Mark said. "We'll take the Commandments one by one."

After the third commandment Mark asked the penitent if he was much given to swearing.

"Gawd Ormighty, mister!" he breathed through the grille. "I don't suppose as there's anuvver bloke in all London what's had so rough a tongue as me. Swear! Gor blime, I've blooming well gone and nearly give myself the rats more nor once with what I've aht and said."

Mark put up his hand to hide a smile, and quickly went on with the recitation of the long fourth commandment, followed by questions about religious observances and the breach of them. *Honour thy father and mother*. After questions about his duty as a son, Mark inquired if he was a father himself.

"No, I ain't, an' I reckon as that's bin my trouble all along."

"*Thou shalt do no murder*. Have you given way to angry and revengeful thoughts?"

"Yuss, I have."

"Have you used violence to anybody?"

"Yuss, I have. I bin very quick wiv my 'ands, I 'ave. I bin known for the way I punched into people. You know, I didn't wait for no back-answers. I 'it fust. And I 'it 'ard."

"Have you any specific—I mean, do you remember

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any one particular act of violence or brutality for which you are truly sorry, and for which you want the forgiveness of Almighty God?"

"Yuss, and that's what I'm 'ere for. I told you I done everyfink. Why don't you arst me if I done murder? Because that's jest what I 'ave been and done. And that's what's on my mind, mister. Yuss, I gone and murdered my old woman last Saturday night. That's why I come over this way, because the tecs was after me. Only, of course, I'll keep aht of their way so long as I can. Well, I reckon that's the nature of a man whether he's a bloody murderer or not. And if I keep out of their way, that don't mean I ain't sorry for what I done, and if I could squeeze the breff back into her the same as I squeezed it aht, take it from me, mister, I'd be 'ome in Oxtan to-night."

"You are truly sorry?" Mark asked.

"Certainly I am. Me and her run well in 'arness togever in a manner of speaking. Only woman-like she had too long a tongue, and whenever I'd had one I used to slosh her in the jore. And I don't reckon as she minded too much either. She used to holler out, yuss, but I reckon as that was more to get the Mrs. Bigmouths dahn our court to start screaming, 'pore thing, fency anyone a-hitting anyone like that. Ain't men brutes?' Well, it give 'em a bit to talk abaht dahn our court, and it pleased my old woman when she found it was my bashings what they talked abaht. But there was one thing as did use to rile me and get me mad, and that was when she used to tell me I wasn't man enough to give her a kid. 'You'll say that once too often,' I'd say. And then she'd go off and—well, it wouldn't do to say what she'd call me, not in a church. But last Saturday night she wouldn't stop, not however hard I hit her. And then I caught ahold of her rahnd the froat and afore I knew what I'd done she was as bleck as my boots, and her tongue heng-ing out fit to give anyone the 'orrors jest to look at it. I reckon as how she tried to keep on a-talking while I was choking the breff aht of her, and that 'ud be what fetched her tongue aht like that. Well, it quieted me, I give yer my word, and I tried to bring her rahnd. But I must

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have kept hold of her jest a moment too long, because she never spoke not another word. So I walked right out of the door and never stopped till I come to Westminster, where I bin hinging around in a doss-house for three days. But it's no good to think the perlice won't get me, because they will."

"And do you realize that your sin is one of the four sins crying to Heaven for vengeance?" Mark asked sternly.

"Well, I know I done worse nor most, and you wouldn't believe how I keeps a-wishing I never hadn't never done it. It come over me terrible strong when I 'id in 'ere out of sight of that copper's eye. It don't seem much use saying as you're sorry for murdering of anyone, because you might be that sorry there wouldn't be a minute go pass but what you'd be saying to yourself: 'Whyever did I go and do it?' But that won't bring back the dead to life, as the saying is. And you never saw anyone deader nor what my old woman was. Cor! Well, she *was* dead. Why, I pick her up and says, 'Maggie, my gal, what's the matter with you?' I says. And she dropped back flop on the bed the same as if she was a old overcoat."

"Well, go on with your confession," Mark said. "*Thou shalt not commit adultery.* Have you had impure thoughts?"

"But there's no sense in going on with no more of it," the penitent objected. "You put all the rest I done against murder and it'll look like nothing at all, if you follow my meaning."

"Never mind," Mark said. "Sin is like a house full of rooms, all of which lead out of one another. You may not have thought that it mattered whether you gave up your Christian duties, though you were brought up as a boy to go to mass and confession. If you had remembered what Father Hazlitt told you when you were a boy, if you had remembered that he had given up everything to keep chaps like you out of deadly sin, you would not have committed that black deed, the thought of which now frightens you."

"It's not that I'm feared of the rope, mister. I take

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my solemn davy I don't give a bloody nothing at all for the rope. I'd as soon swing as mouch arahnd Westminster breaving 'ard and 'eavy whenever a copper looks across the road at me."

"I did not mean that you were frightened of the rope," Mark said. "I hope that you are frightened by the very thought of the dreadful deed you have done, for, as I told you, murder is one of the sins crying to Heaven for vengeance. Go on and finish your confession."

When the last commandment had been repeated and the priestly interrogation was finished, Mark asked him why he had confessed his sins.

"Well, when I was a nipper and knelt dahn by Faver Azlitt, the same as what I'm a-kneeling dahn to you now, he said our sins was fergiven. Of course, I never had nothing like murder to be fergiven, but I've figgered it out like this. I'm safe to swing. Maybe I'd sooner swing, come to that. Maybe I've got it in my head to walk right out of this 'ere church and into the perlice station and give myself up. But while I'm here, I'm a free man, so to speak, and as a free man I tells yer I done murder, for which I arsts fergiveness. Gawd knows I bin a bad 'un, but if I was to slip the 'tecs I believe I'd change right arahnd, only I'm not arsting you to help me slip the 'tecs. Don't you make no mistake abaht that. I'm not arsting for nothing as you can't give, mister. But if I was to get fergiveness now—well, I reckon I'd feel different, somehow. But if you says it's too black to be fergiven and I'd better 'ook it out of this 'ere church as quick as I like, and them's your last words, why I ain't got nothing more to say, 'ave I?"

"Repeat the end of the Confession after me. *For these and all other sins which I cannot now remember.*"

Mark was filled with such an immense compassion for this hoarse-voiced sinner stumbling over the words in his endeavour to repeat what he was told to say that for a moment he could hardly speak.

"My son, I am not going to say very much about the dreadful crime you have committed. You have been brought here by our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ Whose Mercy and Love is so great that He has given you the

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grace to repent. What seems to me so terrible is that you killed that poor woman without giving her time to repent. In a moment of anger you took from her that precious spark of life, and I do beg you in your present mood of sorrow for what you have done to remember that. If it should appear that God has further need of you, and if He spares your life which now belongs to your fellow-men to take from you, so that you escape the earthly punishment of your wickedness, do not forget the mercy shown to you who showed no mercy himself. Try to be better. Remember that your sorrow for the past must display itself in every moment that God gives you upon earth. Do not think that because I speaking in the name of Jesus Christ forgive your sin, that you have no further responsibility. What God has given God can take away. And if God has willed that you pay the just penalty, do not revile Him. Play the man and acknowledge the justice of your punishment."

"Excuse me interrupting, mister, but if I was arst guilty or not guilty, you reckon I ought to say guilty, and let it go at that?"

"I do think that you ought to plead guilty," Mark said. "I think that it would be wrong to repay the mercy of God by lying at your trial."

"But do you reckon I ought to go and give myself up?"

"No," said Mark, "I do not think that you are bound to do that. If you escape arrest, it will mean that God has further need of you. But woe to you, if in that event you are found false to His confidence. Do not betray Him, if you gain your liberty."

"Cor, when you talk like that, mister, I feel I'd almost sooner be took and 'ung before I had time to go wrong again."

"That is cowardly," Mark observed.

"Yuss, but I bin a rank bad 'un, mister, and if I gets a bit of the booze inside of me, I'm a 'ard case."

"Then keep off the booze," Mark said.

"Sign the pledge?"

"Sign the pledge? No!" Mark exclaimed contemptuously. "The pledge was signed for you, when at your

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Baptism the priest marked your forehead with a cross. Promise God here and now that you won't touch a drop of strong drink for as long as He is mercifully pleased to spare your life."

"All right, mister, I've took it."

"Taken what?"

"Took my oaf against the booze. But look, mister, no kidding! It's right abaht getting fergiveness? I won't die and then find there's bin some mistake made. I'd look a bit funny if the foreman up above hollered out, 'Who are you?' You come to think of it, murder's murder. It's not like pinching a bloke's change off of a bar counter."

"I'm thankful that you do realize the greatness of your crime," Mark said. "But the greater your crime, the more joy there will be in Heaven that you have repented. *Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*"

"Still I do wish I hadn't never done it," the penitent sighed hoarsely.

"If it is any consolation to you in your remorse," Mark said, "I should like to tell you that by your repentance you have wonderfully helped the faith of a poor priest."

"Eh?"

"All of us," Mark went on, "all of us human beings have moments when we doubt God's mercy and when we ask why He allows so many dreadful things to happen. Your coming here to-day has helped me. Whatever happens to you, remember that your coming here to-day has helped one poor priest to understand better than he has ever understood what it means to say the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Ghost. And now, before I speak the words of absolution, those wonderful words which are the words of God Himself, I want you to promise to come every morning while you can to Communion. You used to go to Communion when you were a boy?"

"Yersss!" breathed the penitent enthusiastically. "Not half I didn't."

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"Well, will you come again? I shall be saying Mass at seven o'clock every morning this week."

"I'll be there. So long as I can, that is."

Mark pronounced the words of absolution; and when the sinner had vanished from the dusky church, he knelt for an hour in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, for his eyes had seen His salvation.

The next morning at the seven o'clock Mass an awkward shape stumbled up the chancel steps, a queer figure to behold among the pious women who sought God at this hour. On the next morning the same figure presented itself; and when Mark came out of the sacristy to make his thanksgiving after Mass, he found his penitent waiting for him.

"I only wanted to say, mister, I reckon as this'll be the larst time."

"Why?"

"Why, I seen the 'tecs at the corner of the street, and when I come along 'ere, two on 'em followed me. I reckon when I steps ahtside they'll have the darbies on me afore I can move a yard."

It came over Mark to offer him sanctuary in the clergy-house, but he realized almost simultaneously with the thought that it would cause a scandal and not benefit the murderer.

"God be with you through everything," he said.

"There's one thing's bin a bit on my mind, mister, ever since I come away from Oxton. I leff my little bullfinch when I come away, and my old woman being gone he wouldn't get fed proper, perhaps. He's a rare little singer. I was thinking if I get took outside, which I will be, as perhaps you'd go dahn to Oxton and bring him back here with you. He's a rare little piper. They used to say dahn our court it was like a day in the country jest to hear him. Joe Beeton is my name, and Number Two Figgs Court, Oxton's where I lived. Perhaps the coppers might have took him up to the station, seeing as there wasn't no one to stop them. But if he's still there, I'd take it kindly if you'd bring him back 'ere. And I'm sure I thank you very much for all you done for me, which is more nor a feller like me had any right to expeck. Yuss,

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I reckon as they've seen the congeration come out and is jest abaht beginning to arst where our Joe is. Well, good morning, mister."

Mark caught hold of his hand and shook it; and a moment later Joe Beeton, hitching up his trousers and tightening his belt, stepped out into the morning.

The next day he was not at Mass, and in the evening paper Mark read of his arrest.

Mark had decided that the best way to effect his purpose would be to call on the vicar of the parish in which Figgs Court was situated; but when he first met the vicar of St. Simon's, Hoxton, he rather wished that he had relied upon himself. The Reverend George Barnard was a small harassed man with a ragged grey moustache, who looked the last person in the world to understand or sympathize with the object of this intruder upon his parish. However, Mark was most agreeably disappointed in his expectation of hostility.

"This ghastly business has upset me very much," said Mr. Barnard. "The whole district is in a state of unhealthy excitement about it. And I'm afraid that there can be no doubt of the wretched husband's guilt."

"The evidence is clear, is it?" Mark asked.

"Oh, yes, there's no doubt of his guilt. And so this man Beeton asked you to make inquiries about his bullfinch? Dear me, one does not want to appear harsh, but really at such a moment one could wish that his thoughts had been turned away from earthly things altogether."

"Did you know the man personally?" Mark asked.

"No, I never came across him or his unfortunate wife. I'm quite alone here. The living will not support even one curate. The work is really becoming too much for me; but I had a call to come to London, and I exchanged my living in the country with the clergyman who was here. It was a most distinct call, but I fear that I must have disappointed Jesus. I don't seem to have effected anything. Did this wretched creature accost you about his bullfinch?"

"He wished to make his confession and communion," Mark explained. "He was originally from St. Michael's,

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Plaistow, where he had received sacramental teaching as a boy."

"Confession! Dear me, did he really? I'm afraid that I am not an upholder of auricular confession, although I should not like to be too positive that it has never done good to any soul. And did he confess this dreadful murder?"

"Really, Mr. Barnard, I must beg you not to ask me such questions. The poor man's request to inquire after his bullfinch was not made under the seal of the confessional."

"The seal of the confessional? Yes, I believe that Romanists have always made great play with that. But my reading of history leads me to suspect that the seal of the confessional has been broken whenever it suited the sacerdotal craft."

"Indeed, I do hope that you will not introduce controversial matters, Mr. Barnard," Mark said. "I am aware that my interference with the affairs of your parish must appear as an unwarrantable intrusion, but I can assure you that I am only actuated by motives of human kindness. This poor fellow was genuinely distressed about the fate of his bird, and I could do no less than attend to his request at a time when he was expecting to be arrested at any moment."

"I beg your pardon," the vicar of St. Simon's replied. "I am deeply obliged to you for your courtesy in notifying me of your errand. I really live so much alone in this desert of human beings that I have forgotten my good manners. I shall be happy to show you the way to Figgs Court, if you will accompany me."

In the stuffy hall of the grim and dusty vicarage Mr. Barnard pointed out four bicycles wrapped in green baize covers.

"My stable," he said. "I was a great bicyclist when I was at Cambridge. In fact I won the Cambridge to London race for velocipedes in '84. There is a photograph of the teams." He indicated a framed faded photograph of young men with mutton-chop whiskers in striped pill-box caps and a kind of convict's costume, who were holding their velocipedes like so many racehorses. "And

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down in Essex," Mr. Barnard went on, "I used my bicycles everywhere, even if it was only to ride the hundred yards to the village post-office. But nowadays they are rarely exercised, although I still make a habit of riding with the school treats every summer to Epping Forest." He took the green baize cover from one of the racehorses, patted the saddle affectionately, and lifting the back wheel from its stand swung it round by the pedal. "I keep them in good condition, however. They are always well oiled, and I never neglect the gears. This is my favourite. A splendid machine. It has a free-wheel, although when that invention first came out ten years ago I was strongly opposed to it. But I gave way, and this fellow is a real beauty. However, I mustn't bore you with my hobby, though I often wish that I were a millionaire and could provide all the people in my parish with bicycles so that they could get away from chimneys every evening. It's such a healthful hobby; and, you know, I have not the least objection to women's using bicycles. No, Mr. Lidderdale, I am by no means narrow-minded. But come along. I really must not detain you any longer."

He put back the green baize cover on his favourite steed with evident reluctance, and opened the front door for Mark to pass out.

There was, as might have been expected, a group of loiterers, mostly women and children, outside the house where the murder had been committed, and among these the arrival of Mark caused much excitement. He was amused to hear one woman say to another as he passed :

"That's what they call a bishop, Mrs. Lengden. He'll 'ev heard about the murder, you mark my words, and he wants to see where it heppened. It shows 'ow things get around, don't it? Now as they've took old Joe, I dessay as we shall have no end of nobs coming down to have a look at our Court."

"It's to be 'oped they won't put up the rent," Mrs. Langden replied. "It 'ud be jest their style to play a dirty trick like that. The c'leckter didn't say nothing about raising it when he come round to you yesterday, did he?"

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"He never said nothing to me, Mrs. Lengden. But then, there, what do you ever get out of a c'leckter? I know I ain't been behind, not a naypenny, these five months, but the c'leckter he treats me as off-handed as if I was two weeks in areas. But he don't upset Me, he don't. 'There's the week's,' I always makes a point of saying very off-handed to him. And when he signs the receipt, I takes it from him as if it was a bit of dirt he was a-offering me."

"You're right, Mrs. Angcock, and I've always said as you was a woman as well knew how to treat anybody the way they ought to be treated. Look out, Mrs. Angcock, the clergyman's trying to arst you something behind."

Mrs. Langden spoke excitedly, as if Mr. Barnard was about to hit Mrs. Handcock on the head.

"This has been a terrible business," the Vicar said.

"You're right, sir, it have, and no mistake," Mrs. Handcock replied, wiping her hands on her apron before she took the Vicar's proffered hand. "I'm quite well, and I hope as you're not too poorly. Yes, it have been a terrible business. I was only saying to Mrs. Lengden jest before you come in under the archway: 'Well, there, Mrs. Lengden,' I said, 'whoever would have thought, the times we've all of us heard that pore soul hollering out murder, as one day she'd holler out once too often.' Well, as I said to Mrs. Lengden, 'Mrs. Lengden,' I said, 'it's a lesson for us all,' I said, 'and if ever again I hears you holler out murder when Bill, which is Mr. Lengden, starts in bashing you of a Saturday night, 'I'm shore,' I said, 'I'll pay more attention nor what I paid to Mrs. Beeton, pore soul. Yes,' I said, 'it's been a lesson to all of us married women,' I said. And Mrs. Lengden she agreed with every word I spoke."

Mrs. Langden corroborated this assertion by sucking a hollow tooth with the acme of importance and a most sagacious nodding of her head.

"Well," Mrs. Handcock proclaimed, "I've had good cause to remember many things in my time, but this week I shall shorely never forget. I don't remember such a stir in Oxtan not since the Queen come and took tea un-

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expected with Mrs. Umphries in Oxton Street, and which they come and photygraphed for the papers. Only there was some mistake made by the young fellow as worked the machine, and instead of Mrs. Umphries being photygraphed, Mrs. Raggett next door was took instead, and Mrs. Umphries was in bed for a week afterwards, she was that mortificated. Yes, they had it in all the papers as large as life, 'Mrs. Umphries, with oo our bluvud Queen stepped in and had a cup of tea on the occasion of opening the new Town All at Oxton,' and there was Mrs. Raggett standing at the door of her 'ouse and grinning into the machine fit to bust it, and taking to herself all the credick for having the Queen to tea with her. When Mrs. Umphries come down from her bed and met Mrs. Raggett on the pavement, there was a rare set-out, and both on 'em was bound over at Worship Street to keep the peace. But it didn't do no good, because Mrs. Raggett stuck a nat-pin in the back of Mrs. Umphries's leg, if you'll pardon such a vulgar expression; stuck it two an' a narf inches in, she did, and got a month's 'ard for her pains. And it might have been worse, only Mrs. Umphries, being a very fleshy woman, it never reached the bone nor nothing what you might call reelly serious."

Mr. Barnard had been trying to interrupt this long history in order to make some inquiries on behalf of Mark; but Mrs. Handcock gave him no chance until she had finished.

"Wasn't this man Beeton a bit of a bird-fancier?" he asked during her first pause for breath.

"Did you ever hear as Joe Beeton was a bird-fencier, Mrs. Lengden?" Mrs. Handcock demanded.

Mrs. Langden shook her head gloomily.

"I never heard of him fencying nothing, not as I can remember."

At this a little girl who had been standing by open-mouthed for the last five minutes spoke up.

"Yes, he did have a bird, ma. He had a bullfinch in a cage, 'cos I heard it sing one day," she interposed shrilly.

"Well, there!" Mrs. Handcock declared. "What

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children don't know nowadays ain't worth the knowing, as they say. Fency your Alice knowing that ! ”

“When did you see Joe Beeton's bird?” the mother demanded. “And you be careful what you say, my girl, or the perlice 'll be after you and you'll get mixed up in the murder. I never knew such a child for nosing around. It's enough to give anyone the fidgets to hear her.”

“Well, so I did see him,” said Alice. “Me and Artie Enson was going past Mrs. Beeton's door once, and Artie said to me, ‘Ellis Lengden,’ he said, ‘would you like to see a blind bird?’ And we tapped on the door and arst Mrs. Beeton if we could hear it sing, please. And she let us come in, and spoke so nice, and it was right what Artie said, 'cos the bird was blind; and Artie Enson's father told him Joe Beeton blinded it hisself so as it 'ud sing sweeter. He done it with a red-hot wire, and oh, it did sing lovely ! ”

“Well, I always heard it were a good thing to blind a bird's eyes if you wanted it to sing,” Mrs. Handcock commented. “But it seems a bit crool, somehow, don't it?”

“And what happened to the bird?” Mark asked.

“It's to be hoped that the poor little wretch is out of its misery,” the Vicar ejaculated.

“I sore a copper kerrying away a birdcage last Chewsday,” volunteered a sharp-faced child from the middle of the group.

“Oh, you seed a copper kerrying it away last Chewsday, did you, Walter Robinson?” Mrs. Handcock repeated. “Well, you know perfickly well if your mar 'eard you talking about what the perlice done and what they didn't do you wouldn't half get a good hiding.” Then she turned to Mr. Barnard, and in an extremely gruff and would-be mysterious whisper breathed out : “But I reckon as that's jest about what have heppened to it. Only it don't do to encourage children to have sech long tongues.”

There was nothing to be gained by staying here any longer.

“But ain't you going to ask the copper on guard

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if you can't see the very room where it was kermitted?" Mrs. Handcock asked in consternation. "For I'm shore he'd let a clergyman upstairs."

"No, I think my friend and I must be getting along now," the Vicar said. "We are much obliged to you for your information."

"Information?" Mrs. Handcock repeated in a voice of profound dismay. "Well, I do hope neither of you gentlemen is going to say as I've give you any information. My husband 'ud go off his napper if he heard as I'd been giving information."

Mark assured her that nobody could have been more discreet than herself, and he hurried away from Figgs Court with the Vicar of St. Simon's as soon as possible.

"It's strange, isn't it," he said, "the horror that these dear people have of being mixed up in any way with the police? I suppose it's partly due to a kind of freemasonry and partly to a genuine fear of the irrational/ might of the law."

"I'm afraid that your visit has been a sad experience for you," the Vicar replied. "One had hoped to find some redeeming quality in this wretched man Beeton; but there was evidently none."

Mark knew that Barnard was struggling hard not to say how little good the sacramental teaching of his youth seemed to have done him; and that the shrivelled, grey-moustached man succeeded in quelling the temptation to criticize a creed of which he disapproved made Mark less impatient than he might have been in his reply.

"I don't quite agree with you, Mr. Barnard," he said, as they walked along the grey street that swarmed with yelling children and reeked of squalor. "Of course, it's horrible that he should have blinded his bird, but that was done out of ignorance and from lack of imagination. Such a deed cannot be counted against him as it would be counted against you or me. What I ask myself is whether you or I in the situation in which that poor chap found himself would have thought anything about the feeding of a bullfinch. That he did so showed a capacity for love in that brutal nature, and I should be almost inclined to say that his capacity for that love

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would, in spite of whatever sins he may have committed, whatever his violence and cruelty, bring him at last to Paradise. Don't think me a morbid sentimentalist, but it must surely have struck you, amid what seems the ghastly futility of all religion when one looks round at these fetid streets, that the dimmest spark of love flickering here may roar like a furnace at the gates of Heaven."

"I'm afraid that I cannot quite see how any display of love afterwards could possibly atone for such a horrible piece of cruelty. It seems to me that our modern tendency is to make excuses for everybody."

"I admit the danger of a flaccid universalism," Mark said. "But, nevertheless, if one looks round at this," he sighed, with a wave of his arm to the grey, swarming street, "one must either make excuses for humanity, or make excuses for God. And I prefer to make them for humanity. It seems to me that it is just because we are beginning to understand some of the difficulties of human nature that we can appreciate better the love of God. I realize well enough that mankind in the mass is odious, and it is just because I do realize this that I am better able to grasp the wonder of the Incarnation. It seems to me that the Incarnation was the Divine recognition of the individual, the Divine comprehension of the individual, and the Divine mercy to the individual. Mankind justifies an illimitable pessimism in the individual; but the individual merits an equally illimitable optimism for mankind."

"Ah, I'm afraid, Mr. Lidderdale, that our points of view about the Christian religion are too far asunder for us to be able to see eye to eye over a case like this wretched man Beeton."

"Are they really so far apart?" Mark questioned. "I wonder. But, you'll forgive me saying what does seem a terrible admission to have to make. I must say that I sympathize with unbelievers who maintain that they would find it easier to believe in Christianity if they could find two Christians in agreement what Christianity really is. And yet I can't help thinking that most of us do agree, at any rate, what Jesus Christ really is, and that's the fundamentally important thing. Where we disagree

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is the way we try to bring other people to Him. I think that the most practical, the widest, easiest, and straightest road is by means of the Sacraments, most of all that great Sacrament of His Body and Blood. You think that the narrow, steep, and shady path of—well, I scarcely know how to describe the Evangelical creed. But I suppose that Evangelicals would claim that it was a more spiritual and therefore a more intimate way of approach than Catholicism. I may think that your road makes too many demands on human endurance, looking at humanity as a whole. But I can easily recognize the beauty of such an approach for a soul who is strong enough to sustain the burden of that solitary and unaided journey. I remember reading a comment by Dean Farrar on the verse from St. John's Gospel, *God is a Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth*, in which he said that if only people would bear this text in mind when they were arguing about the Real Presence argument would be at an end. Well, perhaps it would be; but how are you going to set about making poor Joe Beeton worship God in spirit and in truth?"

"He would have to be converted," said the Vicar of St. Simon's.

"But who is going to convert him?"

"God," the Vicar affirmed.

"Yes, but surely we must help," Mark insisted.

"That seems to me presumptuous."

"Then what is our priestly duty? What are we for? What is our function?" Mark asked.

"We must preach Christ crucified," the Vicar of St. Simon's affirmed.

"In other words we must help God," Mark contended. "Clearly if God will, all humanity may turn to Him tomorrow without any help from us parsons. My argument is that if our office means anything, it means that God has given us channels of grace for sinners. I cannot believe that the salvation of immortal souls is intended to be brought about by our eloquence. Now, that would seem to me a presumptuous notion. But forgive me for leading you into an argument. I should not have let my tongue run away with me. I am so very much obliged

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to you for your kindness in helping me to fulfil my mission. I often wish that we priests of divergent opinions could meet more often, for I am sure that it would be greatly to our mutual benefit."

They parted with cordial expressions of good will on both sides, and Mark managed to reach Victoria Station with only one change of buses. He rode all the way on top, for although the March air was cold enough, it was air; and latterly he had been so much occupied indoors that he was glad of an opportunity to breathe. Riding on the top of a bus had always been what Father Rowley had most enjoyed when he came up to London from Chatsea to preach. The masses of people on the pavements below had always exhilarated him and inspired with fresh vigour his missionary spirit. On Mark the effect this morning was a return of that impulse to be oppressed by a sense of religion's futility. His faith had been immensely fortified by his experience with Joe Beeton, but now, in its turn, hope was assailed. Of all those hundreds of passers-by on both sides of the road not one recognized another as a friend. During the whole of that long ride he did not see one person stop to greet another. And what percentage of the whole seething mass would stop to greet Christ? *A sower went forth to sow.* Where on these hard paving-stones should his scattered seed find even a moment's space to make root and grow? The cares and riches and pleasures of this world had multiplied so fast that where once they were likened to thorns they might now be likened to barren rock. Mark withdrew for awhile from the contemplation of swarming humanity and took refuge in his breviary. But presently his mind wandered from psalms and antiphons back to mankind. What could a man like the Vicar of St. Simon's, Hoxton, hope to effect? There was a pious and good man, but an utterly negligible personality. Whatever energy he may once have possessed had been spent in racing on velocipedes. And now he was relying on sermons about Christ crucified. It was improbable that he had the least eloquence or fire or force in the pulpit. But even if he had all three, how was dependence on them going to lead to anything? If God inclined his

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congregation to listen to him and granted him the power of moving their souls, what was to sustain their faith in that desert of North London? It was heartrending enough to try to hold people with all the help that all the Sacraments could give, but without them the futility of missionary endeavour must be indescribable. The Vicar of St. Simon's was as far removed from any likelihood of bringing many souls to God as the poor fanatics that stood on the kerbstones of crowded thoroughfares and asked each passer-by that came within earshot if he had found the Lord. But why should he be impeaching the Reverend George Barnard for exceptional futility? It was all futile, when one rode along like this on the top of a bus and surveyed London swirling round one as the sea swirls round a boat. Joe Beeton had been brought up to use the Sacraments; but all the grace in which he had participated had not kept him from murdering his wife, and not only that but from leading a life of consistent brutality as a prelude to his ultimate crime. Was Christianity nothing more than an idea; eternal life an illusion of actual living; God a bright bubble blown from the mind of man; all human aspiration, grace, nobility, and awe nothing except the imaginative refinement through countless ages of a timorous and primeval animism? What was Joe Beeton's behaviour but an expression of fear? His brain, wrought upon by the dread of consequences, had remembered Hell. The prospect of death was too imminent for him to take any risks. He would keep on the right side of the unknown. Any human being would have to be endowed with super-human courage to affirm oblivion in the shadow of the scaffold. And was such an one as Joe Beeton capable of affirming anything? And had not the manner of his will to be reconciled with God indicated an impulse outside the man himself? Yes, yes, it must be the grace of God, and to doubt such a manifestation of Divine love was to blaspheme the Holy Ghost, to do despite unto the Spirit of Grace, for which there would be no forgiveness in this world nor in the world to come. Moreover, there was in that savage and brutal creature a capacity for love. This errand he had taken at his behest was proof

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of it. And if he had judged the Vicar of St. Simon's for not recognizing that love for a blinded bullfinch was the Divine spark in that savage creature, how much more ought he himself to be judged for his sneer at poor dear Barnard's efforts to evangelize Hoxton. Why, if in his whole life he should bring one soul to God, he would be justified in having become a priest.

Joe Beeton's trial was not what is called sensational. He pleaded guilty, and was condemned to death in not much more time than he had taken to commit the crime for which he was to pay the penalty.

By the courtesy of the governor of the prison Mark was allowed to see the condemned man twice; but he was not given permission to attend his last moments. The man was not a Roman Catholic, and to distinguish between the ministrations of one clergyman in the Church of England and another struck the authorities as fantastic. There was a prison chaplain of the Established Church. The ritual for an execution had been arrived at by the careful consideration of what was most seemly, and to suggest at this stage that anything was lacking to it was absurd.

At the last meeting he had with the condemned man, Mark was able to give him comfort; for, being asked if he was sure that God would forgive him, Mark read from the Gospel of St. Luke the story of the penitent thief.

"Yuss," said Joe, shaking his head. "But thieving's one thing and murder's anuvver. If I'd done no worse than creak a few cribs I'd reckon to be fergiven all right. But it don't say nowhere that this 'ere penitent thief done murder. I reckon if he'd done murder they'd have said so in the book. When the judge put on the bleck kep he says to me, 'Joseph Beeton,' he says, 'you 'ave pleaded guilty,' he says, 'to a most shocking, awful crime,' and then he went on for a bit abaht her being my lawful wife and 'ow that made it worse. And then he says, 'I erdvise you to make your peace with Gawd in the short time as remains to you,' but when I was listening to him I reckoned he didn't fency as there would ever be much peace between me and Gawd."

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"I think you probably misunderstood the judge," Mark said. "In any case, the judge only speaks for the law. When I say to you that if you have truly repented of your sins your sins are forgiven now at this very moment, I speak for Almighty God."

"Yer know, when you talks like that," Joe said, "you give me a lot of 'eart, you do. Because, so help me Bob, I am sorry abaht what I done. And though it's easy to talk big abaht what anybody would do and what they wouldn't do when anybody knows as they'll never 'ave the chanst of doing nothing or not doing nothing ever again, yet I reckon, if I was free, I'd be a different man from now on."

"The warder is beckoning to me," Mark said. "Good-bye, Joe. Be brave and think of what our Blessed Lord suffered upon the Cross in order that chaps like you might be with Him in Paradise."

"He was a bit of all right was Jesus Christ. You know : slap up. Good-bye. There's one thing, if I do get in right with the other side, I'll be bound to run up against Faver Azlitt. He'll have something to say abaht the way I behaved. He was always very ahtspoken was Faver Azlitt. I wonder if I'll see my old woman. That'll be what you might call a awkward meeting in a manner of speaking." Joe Beeton shook his head gravely and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "Very awkward," he repeated. "Not to say nasty. But I suppose she'll take a bit of the blame for what she called me. And, anyway, I'll be glad to see her again."

He took Mark's outstretched hand.

"If you could put in a bit of praying for me on Chewsday morning, I'd like to think you was at it."

"I shall watch and pray all night," Mark promised. "That I vow. If you wake in the night and feel lonely, you'll know that I am outside the prison walls watching and praying."

"What, jest ahtside?" Joe exclaimed.

"Yes, just outside."

"Well, blow me, if you ain't a sport !"

Mark kept his word, and all night until eight o'clock

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of that Tuesday morning in mid-May he was never more than a hundred yards from the prison gates. He had intended to dress in lay attire for this vigil, because he thought that the presence of a parson walking up and down all night outside Pentonville might create a scandal for the cloth; but on second thoughts he decided that he should be less likely as a clergyman to run the risk of being moved on by the police, and he should never forgive himself if any untoward accident prevented his keeping that promise to the dying man.

So all night Mark watched in the shadow of the great bulk of Pentonville, seeing from Roman Road the stars set behind the towering walls and from Caledonian Road new stars rise above them. Toward dawn drovers passed, driving sheep to the slaughter-houses in the cattle market close by. A fresh breeze blew up, ruffling the pages of Mark's breviary; and dawn was in the sky beyond the prison. More sheep passed, already inclined to turn and run back from the first scent of blood borne along the breeze. The most superficial moralist could not have avoided a comparison between those sheep being driven to slaughter on the left of the Caledonian Road and that man soon to be slaughtered on the right. All this time the sheep had been carefully tended. A shepherd had listened anxiously for their first tremulous bleatings in the cold midway of a January night. In their lambhood they had been guarded well, except those that were slaughtered to give a flavour to Eastertide. They had been tended in illness and shielded from harm, folded on turnips and pastured on grass, until now they were hustled anyhow on and on to where the butcher's knife was waiting. But the man who was going to die on the other side of the road had not been very carefully tended by society, neither he nor his parents nor his forefathers back through the centuries. Yet, when he broke a law of that society which had been oblivious of his existence until that moment, immense attention was paid to him. Policemen, lawyers, magistrate, judge, journalists, doctor, chaplain, warders, sheriff, coroner, hangman, nothing was wanting to conduct him out of life with a thousand thousand times more ceremony than the poor devil had

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been conducted into it. He would even be accorded the posthumous compliment of an inquest.

"Oh, how I hope that Man is immortal," Mark sighed to himself. "But believe it at this moment I cannot. Yet if I deny my immortality I must deny my God, because no God fit to be worshipped could allow the torture of a mortal soul that is going on now. Unless that man in there is to be given a chance of expiation in another life, then capital punishment is a damnable horror."

The grey clouds of early dawn above the prison quickened to a glowing lavender that was fanned by the last breath of the dying wind to a cold furnace of rose; and at the moment of intensest colour, just before the crenellated housetops showed jetty black against the first golden splashes of the emerging sun, a cart loaded with baskets of lilac lumbered southward to Covent Garden, breathing forth upon the air what seemed the very perfume of those far-off heavenly vapours and matching them with its own flowery hues. When the sun rose above the prison walls, and Mark felt the warmth of it on his tight, strained face and saw the faint blue expanse of all that tender morning sky pavilioning London; when he saw the lucent fume of the city's smoke rising up as if to swoon away upon that tender sky; when he first recognized that it was full day and that in less than four hours that dying man would be dead, he experienced such a revolt against everything except the material loveliness of earth that not even the prospect of immortality was sufficient to justify society in deliberately depriving a human being of existence upon that earth. Mark was seized with a desire to beat upon the prison gates and cry in the words of Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;

To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God.

If capital punishment were right, why did people

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shrink from the hangman? Why should the thought of the hangman's sitting down to a meal with his wife and family make the gorge rise? It was useless for the supporters of capital punishment to taunt one with sentimentalism, unless they were prepared to taunt Christianity itself with sentimentalism. There must be something wrong about a punishment that postulated monsters of Frankenstein to carry it out. No doubt in this case the condemned man was not suffering the tortures of deathly anticipation that was making for him a goblin of this mild May morn. But when the footsteps of the hellish automatons were wound up to tramp toward the cell; when the door was flung open, and that unclean figure, so much the more unclean because unmasked, as if a leper should expose his filthy sores to debauch a child's gaze, was wound up to pinion the victim; and when that chaplain was wound up to mutter what in such circumstances could only be considered a blasphemous parody of the Burial Service; and when . . .

Mark thought he must go mad.

Had the abolition of public executions without abolishing at the same time capital punishment really been a reform? No. It was better that a man should be killed amid the spectacle of human depravity, so that his last moment might seem a flight from demons to the refuge of angels, than that silently, efficaciously, mechanically, slyly he should be put away. The long procession to Tyburn had been abolished because of its bad effect upon the populace; the public execution in front of the jail, because of its bad effect upon the populace. Men had argued that with the abolition of these the deterrent effect of capital punishment would be lessened. And now what positive proof was there that this decorous capital punishment was any kind of deterrent? As for its effect on the public, was it not a thousand times better that it should have a bad effect than that, as now, it should have no effect at all, for that it did have a bad effect argued as much against capital punishment as against the behaviour of the populace.

Had Joe Beeton slept last night? Was he sleeping

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now? Or was he at this very instant waking for the last time? Or dressing himself for the last time? Or coughing or sneezing or doing any one of the many insignificant bodily acts for the last time and thus giving to insignificance an unbalanced significance? But a man like Joe Beeton would not have the necessary imagination to heap horror upon horror in his mind like this. This was to endow Joe Beeton with the hyperæsthesia of an over-refined civilization. And in any case Joe Beeton should have thought of all this when his fingers were round his wife's throat. But if he lacked the imagination to suffer the tortures of anticipation, in that case he must have lacked equally the imagination either to be deterred from his crime by the comprehension of the penalty or even as much imagination as to let him know what he was doing. And of course he never had known what he was doing. He had been like a maddened bull that rushes against a stone wall. He came to himself, and she was dead. He had tried to revive her, and the limp body had flopped back upon the pillow like an overcoat. Society had sold him the alcoholic poison that was more responsible than he. Mark had no wish to enforce prohibition of strong liquor. He did not believe in any legal action to secure man against the precious and perilous gift of free will; but if society profited by the sale of strong liquor, society must be ready to pay some of the penalty. So long as any part of the country's revenue was derived from the sale of alcohol, so long were the teetotal fanatics who enjoyed that revenue in the moral condition of men who lived on the prostitution of women, and if they had any sincerity of passion for the reform they advocated they should offer themselves as substitutes for men like Joe Beeton, whom society was murdering. And the poisoner? Ought he not to pay the penalty? Yes, if revenge were the frank object of punishment. But society had abandoned the theory of revenge. Capital punishment was regarded nowadays by those who still believed in its efficacy as an unpleasant but necessary amputation of a diseased limb. And in the way it was carried out it was redolent of the surgery and the operating theatre. It reeked of antiseptics.

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But what should be substituted for capital punishment? Solitary confinement for life? No, let the murderers of the world be placed by the world upon some island or in some remote territory. Enough islands and remote territories had been stolen from their native owners. Let some island of which the original inhabitants had been murdered by tuberculosis, venereal disease, alcohol, and rifles serve for the murderers of the world. Let their women go with them, if they would, into exile, and let a company of priests devote themselves to their spiritual service, seeking to raise that society of outcasts once more to the right of human fellowship, and present them to God as a humble and contrite offering for the wrongs committed by His chosen people against the aborigines.

Utopias and Erewhons . . . dreams and phantasies . . . prayer availed more.

Mark resumed his walk round the prison walls, repeating to himself beneath their shadow the seven penitential psalms, until the benignant sun of May had climbed above the bulk of Pentonville.

At half-past seven a group of people, many of them children, had gathered by the gates of the prison, and one child was reading out in a shrill voice the notice of an execution. The group became a small crowd. There was not, then, a complete indifference. But was there any compassion for that man labouring with his soul in the agony of approaching death while his body was still in the prime and vigour of his manhood? There was none. These people stared at the notice on the prison gates as they would have stared at the playbill of a melodrama.

It was a quarter to eight.

The bell from a neighbouring church began to toll. The sun was high now, shining with all the kindly warmth of May, beaming upon his little world, drinking the health of his daughter world in warm golden wine. Mark thought of Wordsworth's lines :

*Far and wide the clouds were touched,
And in their silent faces could he read
Unutterable love.*

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"Well, he's got a nice fine morning for his hanging, anyway," a voice cried.

And this was followed by shrieks of hysterical laughter.

It was more than Mark could bear.

"Dear men and women and little children, you are standing by a death-bed. Do not laugh. The man who will in a few minutes be dead will die trusting in the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. Can you who have come here this morning, more out of curiosity than out of pity, can you all say as much? But that poor sinner still needs your prayers. Don't be ashamed to kneel down with me and pray for him in his agony. Even our dear Lord Jesus Christ, when He was nailed to the Cross, cried out in despair, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* If such was the desolation of One Who died to save all sinners, try to think how utterly and terribly alone the poor sinner inside that great gloomy building must be feeling now. Your prayers will pass through those walls and reach him. They will. Indeed they will. They will reach him like the words spoken by our dear Lord to the thief who was crucified beside Him. *Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.* Think what those wonderful words of consolation must have meant to that penitent thief. And think of our loving Saviour, Who in the midst of His Own Dreadful agony could still forget Himself to console another sufferer.

"Your prayers, dear people, your prayers for the man that perhaps some of you knew! He may have been brutal and cruel, but he has repented of his brutality and cruelty. Have you all of you led such good lives that you can afford to laugh at what he is suffering now? Will you never have need of the charity of Christian souls? Pray God that you will all die in your beds and make a good end. But every single one of you will one day endure the agony of death. Then pray with all your souls, and with all your hearts, and with all your human nature for him. At this moment the hangman is testing the straps with which Joe Beeton's arms will be fastened. They are getting ready! The governor of the prison is looking

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at his watch! He has only a few minutes left! Kneel down and pray with me."

And all the people knelt.

O Lord Jesus Christ, Who hast redeemed us with Thy precious Blood, write with that Thy precious Blood Thy Wounds in the soul of Joseph Beeton; that he may learn to read in them Thy Sorrow and Thy Love. Sorrow, against all the sorrows, anguish, and pain that for his sins he has deserved; Love, that he may live to Thee with that inviolable love through which he may never for evermore be separated from Thee and Thine Elect.

"The clock is striking eight!" Mark cried. "Stand to arms, you Holy Angels! To arms, to arms!"

Make him, O Lord, a partaker of Thy Most Holy Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension. Make him to share all the prayers and benefits which are in Thy Holy Church, make him a partaker of all the blessings, graces, merits, and joys of all Thine Elect, who have pleased Thee from the beginning of the world; and grant unto him that he may rejoice with them all in Thy presence for evermore, Who with God the Father and God the Holy Ghost livest and reignest God world without end. Amen.

Mark rose from his knees.

"His soul has passed! Eternal rest grant him, O Lord, and may perpetual light shine upon him. . . .

"And now go home humbly and quietly, and this evening creep to church and thank God that by His mercy you still have time to live new and better and purer lives."

With this Mark blessed them and walked quickly away. When he got back to Pimlico he went into the church and spent hours in prayer before the Host.

On the following afternoon, it being the vigil of the Ascension, he was hearing confessions, and he had been even more insistent than usual with his penitents that they should esteem at all its priceless worth the grace conferred upon them by the sacrament and that they should be sufficiently grateful to Almighty God for their Catholic privileges. He was feeling the effects of that night outside Pentonville more this afternoon than on the previous day; and because he was tired and strained

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he was more scrupulous in not hurrying over his directions, although, looking out across the church, he could see that there was an exceptional number of people waiting to make their confessions. It was close on six o'clock before the last penitent presented herself. She happened to be a young woman who was extremely interested in her sins; and whereas another day Mark would have hustled her along and not allowed her to treat him like a fortune-teller, which was too often the tendency of young women in the confessional and had to be severely checked, this afternoon the consciousness of his own overwrought and fatigued state of mind made him too anxious, and she must have spent a great many unnecessary minutes in the self-indulgence of asking his direction and help. At last, however, she finished, and on being given absolution retired down the aisle in a glow of self-absorption, her cheeks flushed, her eyes bright with the memory of a deliciously thrilling experience. Mark waited a moment or two in case anybody else was wishing to detain him, looked at his watch, and was surprised to find that it was after half-past six. He must hurry if he wanted a cup of tea before seven o'clock, when the first vespers of the feast would be sung. He was thankful that he was neither preaching to-night nor saying the office. Taking off his purple stole and surplice, he emerged from the box to find a tall, cadaverous individual glaring at him and apparently anxious to speak.

"I've been watching you all the time, you dirty, vile blackguard," the stranger said. "Yes, I dare say you thoroughly enjoyed yourself with that pretty girl who passed out just now. You vicious brute! Aren't you ashamed of yourself to practise your degraded and corrupt priestcraft and vile Popish lust in a decent country like England?"

"If you want to have a controversial discussion," Mark replied quietly, "you'd better come outside. There will be a service beginning presently."

"I wouldn't soil my lips by arguing with you," said the stranger. "If I could get you locked up I would. You seducer of innocence!"

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"Come along," Mark said sharply. "I can't have you making a noise here."

"Do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to find out your name and I'm going to write to the Bishop and to the police and tell them that you're not fit to be left alone with pure-minded girls."

Mark took a step toward the door of the church, upon which the stranger cried out excitedly :

"You're not going to run away, you brute. I'm going to have your name before I leave."

"If you come outside I'll tell you," Mark said.

The stranger, who was his own height, and, as Mark thought whimsically, not so very much unlike him to look at, followed him outside.

"My name is Lidderdale—Mark Lidderdale."

"It's a name I'll make stink in the nostrils of decent men and women," the stranger promised.

"You won't forget it?" Mark asked gently. "You might, you know. Perhaps I'd better knock you down to help you remember that my Christian name is Mark."

With this he knocked him down, helped him to stand on his feet again, and left him fumbling for his handkerchief.

CHAPTER XIV

ST. WILFRED AND ST. CHAD

MARK'S way of dealing with a lewd busybody did his church some disservice by attracting a good deal of public attention to it after he had been summoned and fined for assault. Mark's victim, Frederick Swatton by name, hired a room within the confines of the parish and attempted to interfere with the procession of the Host through the open streets on the feast of Corpus Christi. He was dealt with less forcibly on this occasion, whereupon he applied to the magistrate for a warrant for a breach of the King's peace against the whole body of clergy attached to St. Chad's. On this being refused he raked together a number of putative malcontents, who were indeed parishioners but had no claims to be called worshippers at St. Chad's, and presented a petition to the Bishop against Roman abuses. The chief supporters of Mr. Swatton were a chemist close to Victoria station, who sold more of ergot and pennyroyal than any other drugs, and the keeper of a brothel, against whom Hett had stirred up the police to take action.

The Bishop felt bound to observe that any celebration of the feast of Corpus Christi in the Church of England was unwarranted, and as for celebrating it by carrying the Host under a red umbrella round the streets of Pimlico, that seemed to him quite inexcusable and likely to be the cause of most painful scenes of irreverence. No, he was not paying the least attention to the petition addressed to him by discontented parishioners. The chief organizers of that petition might be everything of which Mr. Whitmore accused them, but that had nothing to do with the case. He must extort from Mr. Whitmore a most solemn promise never to permit such a procession to take place again. He had done all that he could to be

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sympathetic with Mr. Whitmore's methods. He had, against his own better judgment, allowed him to reserve the Blessed Sacrament exclusively for the use of the sick; but the notion of carrying it round in procession was repugnant to him; yes, It was indeed most painfully repugnant, and while sincerely anxious to do everything he possibly could to help Mr. Whitmore in his work, he felt inexpressibly shocked by what had occurred.

No sooner had the fuss over the Corpus Christi procession subsided than Hett, strongly supported by Cumberbatch, persuaded Whitmore to hold the Quarant'ore.

"I've looked up *ve Instructio Clementina*," Cumberbatch announced with gusto. "And I fink we can do it splendidly. I'll make all *ve* necessary arrangements for *ve* relays of watchers. No women are allowed inside *ve* church all night, and at least twenty candles must be kept burning all *ve* time."

The Exposition took place with Mass of Exposition at the beginning and Mass of Deposition at the close, and in the middle a votive Mass of the Most Holy Sacrament. Nothing was wanting of outward correctness, and yet there was nobody who did not feel that it had not possessed the spiritual appeal that it ought to have possessed. Something had been wrong.

It was the first time that Mark had experienced this particular malaise of mind in regard to any service at the altar. When he first came to London he had chosen as his director the Vicar of All Souls', Haymarket, who besides being a man of the saintliest life and the profoundest scholarship, was generally recognized as the leader of the Catholic party among the clerics of the Church of England; in whose doctrine and belief not the most advanced member of that party could find a flaw; and yet who, by his prudence, gravity, and common sense had been able to influence the episcopate as no Catholic priest had been able to influence it during the last twenty years to sympathize with the aspirations of the individual priest toward the perfection of sacramental teaching and practice. To him soon after the Quarant'ore Mark went to confession, in the course of which he accused himself of a lack of faith in regard to the Exposition. On being

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questioned more closely by Canon Warrilow he was inclined to substitute a lack of hope for a lack of faith.

"I had one of those attacks of despair," he said. "An almost unbearable sense of the futility of it all."

Canon Warrilow suggested that he might have been overworking himself lately, and before Mark could deny this said quickly that though personally he should derive from an Exposition nothing but the greatest spiritual help, he did feel that the way such devotions had to be carried on in the present condition of the English Church militated very greatly against the intention of those who introduced them.

"I should be the last," he said, "to undervalue in any way the work of pioneers, but I cannot help feeling that the consciousness of doing something rather daring, something that is almost flouting and defiant, must detract from the spirit of pure devotion which could be the only justification for such a service. You used to be worried by Mr. Moxon-Hughes's mediæval effects, because they savoured of play-acting. Did not—mind you, I make this suggestion with the utmost diffidence—did not your Forty Hours' Exposition at St. Chad's possibly affect you slightly, very slightly in the same way?"

"But Benediction doesn't," Mark said. "And Benediction is regarded as an unwarrantable innovation by the whole of the Anglican episcopate. Yet I am profoundly convinced of its incalculable benefit, especially in a church where the congregation chiefly consists of poor people."

"I am entirely at one with you about that benefit. But wouldn't you feel happier in giving Benediction if you had episcopal sanction? You must remember that among the Romans the episcopal licence is necessary to use a monstrance. I don't feel that it's really possible to argue that one is entitled to defy one's bishop over Benediction."

"Yes, I should feel happier if it were sanctioned," Mark admitted. "But I can't agree with you that the episcopal licence required by Roman parish churches is comparable. I presume that such a licence is necessary to guard against any possible competition with Mass."

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But you cannot pretend that any Anglican bishop would object to Benediction on those grounds."

"Well, I don't think it's advisable to argue that point at the present moment. I cannot help feeling that you want a rest. You have been working very hard. Wouldn't it be possible for you to have a kind of rest by taking up some work for a few months in the country? Why not go home for a while and help Mr. Ogilvie?"

His director was only giving expression to an idea that had been in Mark's own head for several weeks now; but he had a dread of giving way even temporarily to what seemed a weakness of the spirit, and he insisted that his depression was due to nothing more than the hot weather.

The strife between St. Chad's and the Bishop began again, and presently Benediction was laid under an episcopal interdict. Whitmore called a meeting of his clergy and churchwardens to decide upon their attitude. Was it to be defiance? Would the Bishop venture to proceed against such a powerful centre of Catholic work as St. Chad's? Letters were written to various dear brothers all over England. Intrigues were set on foot to get round the Bishop. Drogo Mortemer of St. Cyprian's rushed from clergy-house to clergy-house in a taxi. Canon Warrilow journeyed up to Oxford to consult with the most influential priest at Keble House. Father Waterlow, S.S.J.E., journeyed down from Oxford to go carefully into the whole question from the point of view of liturgical authority. Seventeen unbeneficed clergy representing Anglo-Catholic opinion all over the United Kingdom presented a grand remonstrance to the *Church Times*. Lord Hull was in perpetual consultation. Five prominent members of the C.B.S. demanded that the Confraternity should issue an official pronouncement whether the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament did or did not affirm the doctrinal utility of Benediction. Moxon-Hughes brought out a pamphlet asserting that liturgical services had practically vanished, and that the old seasons of the Christian year so deeply beloved in England before the Reformation were gradually losing their importance. Lent was turned into the month of

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Joseph; Christmas was dislocated by the Immaculate Conception; Easter was upset by the Month of Mary; and Whitsuntide had been swallowed up in the Sacred Heart. At this rate the Holy Mass would soon be displaced by Benediction. Several High Church divines wrote and proclaimed their firm conviction that they were second to none in true Catholicity, but was Benediction apostolic? Was there any authority for it in St. Paul's epistles, or even in St. Irenæus? And several Broad Church divines took the opportunity to ask why, when it was becoming every day more difficult for the educated modern man to believe in either the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection of the Body, or even in view of the grave difficulty about the Fourth Gospel for him to feel quite sure from his study of the synoptic gospels that Jesus Christ ever believed himself to be God, the educated modern man should be affronted by a return to the degraded materialism of scholastic superstition. Whereupon several Low Church divines wrote to say that, while repudiating the abominable suggestion that Jesus Christ was not Very God, they repudiated with equal vigour the insult offered to His Godhead by the so-called "Anglo-Catholics" in trying to undo the work of the Reformation. The lay press could not understand what all the fuss was about. It seemed to them extraordinary that clergymen could possibly attach so much importance to forms and ceremonies. The only hope for Christianity was for all Christians to give up quarrelling and reunite, and meanwhile could anything be more dastardly than the conduct of the present Government or more ruffianly than the manœuvres of the Opposition or more atrocious than the behaviour of the Labour party, according to the politics of the paper that was lecturing what it called "The Churches."

And then upon all this clatter and chatter of contentious opinion the oblivion of August scattered her poppies.

"Well, it's to be hoped we shall be allowed to keep ve Assumption in peace and quiet," said Cumberbatch. "Faver Whitmore tells me vat nuffing need be decided one way or ve uvver till ve middle of September."

"And I'm going off for my holiday on the sixteenth," Mark announced.

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"Are you, Faver? Well, I'm sure I'm delighted to hear it. Because I fink you're looking very jaded. Very jaded indeed. A short change 'll do you good. Where are you going?"

"Oxfordshire."

"Why don't you go to ve Souf of Italy? You'd like vat."

"Too hot. Much too hot in August."

"Yes, I suppose it would be a bit grilling in August," Cumberbatch admitted. "But you would like to see ve beautiful simple faif of ve peasants. Most touching, I can assure you. I was staying in a small place once in June, a dear little village right out of ve beaten track, under ve patronage of St. Anthony of Padua. . . ."

"So far out of the beaten track," Mark laughed, "that it took St. Anthony to find it."

"Ha-ha! Vat's good. Ha-ha-ha! Vat's really capital. I must remember vat. But you know, seriously, vat idea of St. Anthony's being ve only saint who'd found a village would make a capital legend. It would really. Well, as I was telling you, vey had a procession, and really vey had one beautiful effect. Vey had a wax *bambino*, and when ve image of ve Saint came round ve corner vey ran vis wax *bambino* along a wire right into his arms, and for ve rest of ve way he carried ve Holy Child in his arms. I tell you, it was simply beautiful. It brought tears into my eyes."

The Feast of the Assumption was not celebrated with the peacefulness and quiet that the ceremoniarus had hoped; nor did Mark go away to Oxfordshire on the sixteenth, as he had announced, for on the vigil Whitmore and Hett were both received into the Roman Church.

The news came as a great shock to Mark and to everybody else. Never once in the many discussions that had been held since the Bishop's threat to take strong action had this solution of the difficulty been suggested as a possible way out. Hett had always been inclined before to take up a pessimistic attitude about the future of the English Church, but Mark had listened to his strictures so often and had indeed agreed with so many of them that

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he had always regarded Hett's inclination to Rome as purely theoretical. That he would ever give practical expression to it had never entered his head. As for Whitmore's going over, that was stupefying. He had realized, of course, that Whitmore, beneath all his appearance of light-hearted perplexity, sometimes apparently so light-hearted that one would hardly have been astonished to see him put the whole matter to the test of a spun coin, was actually suffering intensely from his inability to decide what was the right course of action. But this was no solution, or at best only such a solution as a man adopts when he commits suicide to find a way out. No wonder that the Exposition of the Forty Hours had been a failure somehow, for all the time Whitmore and Hett must have been doubting if the Sacred Host was veritably the Body of Christ. Mark remembered his own qualms when he was at St. Cuthbert's. But they had been nothing more than a reaction against the Moxon-Hughes religion. He had never really had the least intention of denying his priesthood. Perhaps Hett was safer in the Roman Church. Yes, perhaps he had done wisely to put himself more definitely under authority. But Whitmore! What could Whitmore be but utterly miserable?

"It's awful, isn't it?" Cumberbatch groaned. "I feel fifty years older since I heard ve news. And it'll be such a terrible shock to our dear old patron, who was always very anti-Roman so far as such a dear old boy could be anti-anything. Of course, one doesn't want to breave a word against any saint, but one can't help feeling vat, if St. Wilfred hadn't gone dashing off to Rome when he did, Faver Whitmore and Faver Hett would never have had any temptation to do ve same."

When Cumberbatch mentioned St. Wilfred, it struck Mark for the first time that since he had been in London he had not paid one visit to St. Wilfred's, Notting Dale, to the church built by his father's efforts, and to Lima Street, where he had been born twenty-eight and a half years ago.

"Have you ever been to St. Wilfred's, Notting Dale?" he asked the ceremoniaris.

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"Yes, I've been vere once or twice. Faver Viner is ve vicar. He's a splendid fellow."

A week after this conversation Chator came bubbling and spluttering into the common-room of the Clergy House, where Mark was explaining to Cumberbatch that it was impossible, with only Chator and himself to carry on until the Bishop offered the living to another priest, to complicate the situation by any more open-air processions. Cumberbatch had suggested that the image of St. Chad carried solemnly round the bounds of the parish would have a reassuring effect on any weak souls who were being tempted to follow the example of their late Vicar and his senior curate.

"Who do you think has accepted the living?" Chator spluttered. "Splendid appointment! Couldn't be better. I'm delighted! I hope he'll keep me on. Who do you think? Who *do* you think? Viner, of St. Wilfred's, Notting Dale."

Mark and Cumberbatch looked at each other.

"I say, vat's raver an extraordinary fink. You know, a materialist would call vat a coincidence, but I'm not a materialist. I say vat gives one furiously to fink, as the French say."

Two days after this Chator came in more than bubbling, more than spluttering, in his hands a letter which he waved, incapable of coherent speech. At last he managed to gasp:

"I say, what do you think's happened? The Bishop has offered me St. Wilfred's." And Chator bellowed with joyful pride: "O praise the Lord, all ye heathen, praise him, all ye nations!"

"I say," said Cumberbatch solemnly, "vis is getting a bit fick."

A fortnight later the ceremoniarus followed Whitmore and Hett. He told Mark that he did not dare to resist what he considered was nothing less than the direct interposition of St. Wilfred himself.

"But how about St. Chad?"

"Oh, I fink St. Chad probably interposed as well. You must remember, Faver—Mr. Lidderdale, vat St. Chad retired at once to Lastingham when the Archbishop,

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St. Feodore, told him vat he had no business to be in St. Wilfred's see."

"But, my dear Cumberbatch," Mark protested, "you can't really mean to tell me that you've left the English Church for the sake of a coincidence? It was the kind of coincidence that leads people to back some particular racehorse, but not to desert the Church of their baptism."

"Oh, it was more van a coincidence, Faver—Mr. Lidderdale. Putting it at its lowest, it was an omen."

"Yes, but an omen isn't enough. You can't change your belief for an omen."

"I'm not changing my belief," Cumberbatch argued. "Vere's nuffing I believe now vat I didn't believe when I was an Anglican."

"Then do you believe now that when you believed that it was the Body and Blood of our Lord it was all the time nothing but bread and wine?"

"Well, I'm afraid I do."

"Then I think your faith is a kind of conjuring trick," Mark said angrily. "But that's always the way with you ex-spiritualists; you never really escape from a folly that you were once fool enough to accept as wisdom. I've no patience with anybody who changes round like you. Direct interposition of St. Wilfred! Who ever listened to such rubbish?"

"I wish you'd join us," said Cumberbatch in accents of intensely benevolent melancholy, and looking, as Mark told Chator afterwards with a laugh, exactly like the walrus inviting the oysters to come for a stroll.

Viner was anxious to stay at St. Wilfred's until after the patronal festival on October 12th, and on hearing who Mark was, he pressed him to come over and preach one evening in Notting Dale. But this invitation Mark refused, on the plea of the extra work at St. Chad's. The truth was that he dreaded a visit to his birthplace at this moment. He was afraid to revive those earliest impressions of his father, lest he should have a sudden revolt against all religion. He recognized that he was in a nervous and overstrained condition, and he felt convinced that he should be wise to do nothing that could possibly exacerbate that condition. There were moments

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when the promptings of seeming cowardice should be obeyed. Nor would he accept the new incumbent's invitation to stay on at St. Chad's as his senior curate. He liked Viner very much, for he reminded him in some ways of Stephen Ogilvie; but perhaps this very resemblance strengthened his resolve to spend the next few months at Wych-on-the-Wold.

CHAPTER XV

OUT OF WHOM WENT SEVEN DEVILS

ON a blowy night in early October, just ten days before he was due to leave Pimlico, Mark was sitting in his room when the bell of the Clergy House rang sharply. He had been reading the life of St. Francis of Assisi, whose Feast it had been, and, turning the pages of the Lives of the Saints, he had come across the account of St. Thais, the famous penitent of the austere Egyptian Paphnutius, among the saints commemorated four days hence. He had been moved by the brief and simple narrative and had been making up his mind to read farther into her history, when the bell rang. The maid came up to say that a little girl was asking for a priest to take the Sacrament to a dying woman at once, and Mark told her that the little girl had better wait while he went to fetch the pyx, so that she could walk back with him to the house. It was past ten o'clock, and the wind, gathering fury all the time, whirled round the church, sounding like fiends of Hell that feared to lose a victim and would deter the priest from his sacred task.

Hanging the pyx round his neck by a silken cord and cramming a white stole into the pocket of his soutane, Mark hurried back to the Clergy House, where a little girl with big blue eyes was perched on a hall chair, from which she slid down as soon as he spoke.

"Have we far to go, my dear?"

"Redmans Terrace, sir."

"Come along, then. Take hold of my hand, and we shall go all the faster."

The wind was raging along the flat grey façade of Balm Street, and from time to time stronger gusts swooped down upon the lamps, making them reel and flutter like frightened birds.

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"And whose little girl are you?" Mark asked.

"Please, sir, I'm Mrs. Budd's little girl."

The name was unfamiliar to him.

"Is it your mother who is so ill?"

"Oh no, sir, it's not mother. It's our lady lodger. Mother didn't want me to come out so late."

"But she was quite right to let you come, because it was an errand of mercy. It was doing something for our dear Lord."

"Yes, sir."

Something in the way the child spoke made Mark wonder if she knew to Whom he was referring.

"You know Who our Lord is?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"You don't ever come to church?"

"No, sir. Mother says she's got something better for me to do of a Sunday morning. I does a good bit for her about the house."

"Our Lord is our Lord Jesus Christ. You know Who Jesus Christ is?"

"It's what we learn at school."

Mark sighed. He must visit Redmans Terrace some day on another errand.

"Is this poor lady very ill?" he asked.

"They reckon she'll die almost any time now. Mother ain't half in a way over it. She said if she'd have known she'd have give her a week's notice to leave before she got so bad."

"What is your father? Does he live at home?"

"No, sir. He's a ship's steward. He comes home once in a while. But he rows with mother most of the time."

They turned a corner as the little girl said this, and met the full force of the wind coming from the river.

"Hold on tight," Mark said, "or you'll be blown right away."

The little hand squeezed his closer, and he uttered a silent prayer to the Sacred Heart that the flame of Its undaunted love would shed warmth upon the small soul beside him.

"Take her to Thy Heart, O Lord. Teach her to know

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Thee. O Mother of God, look down and set this little child in the arms of Thy Son, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."

"There's another lady with our lady lodger," Mark's small companion announced. "You know, one of them as dresses so funny."

"A nurse?"

"No, not a nurse. She couldn't afford no nurse. She couldn't afford to pay her rent for a fortnight. Not since she got this pumonia the matter with her."

"Ah, a sister of mercy!" Mark exclaimed gladly.

"Yes, that's what she called herself," said the little girl. "Such a nice lady. If she hadn't spoke so nice to mother, mother wouldn't never have let me come."

"And what does the poor sick lady work at when she's well?" Mark asked.

He felt the child's grasp of his hand relax a moment as she muttered:

"I don't know."

Mark divined by the tone of her voice that she knew only too well and that it was knowledge of evil. He pressed his free hand against the pyx in agony. The full horror of the Fall from primal innocence was suddenly made known to Mark's imagination, for God must have created Man and Woman with the eyes of children. He hurried along in silence, repeating to himself the *Miserere*; and presently they turned off into Redmans Terrace from the wide and wind-swept road running down to the river.

On the steps of Number Ten a woman was watching for them.

"*Peace be to this house and to all that dwell in it,*" Mark said.

"I was anxious about Mabel," the woman told him. "Well, anyone doesn't like to have a child out alone at this time of night."

Mrs. Budd was a woman of about forty with the remains of a beauty that not even her swift decline into a slatternly middle-age had yet managed to destroy. When she bent down to kiss Mabel with evident relief at her safe return, Mark could not help wishing that

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she had felt as much anxiety to guard her daughter against the premature knowledge of evil as she had felt about her nocturnal errand of mercy.

"Mrs. Shoolbred is in the back room along the passage," she said. "She's going fast, pore thing, all of a-mutter, and anything you do catch you can't make head or tail of. The doctor said he'd look in about mid-night, but he didn't hold out any hopes. Here comes the Sister, who's a thoroughly nice ladylike person, I'm bound to admit."

"Is that the priest?" a quiet voice asked, and Mark looking up quickly saw that it was Esther.

"Perhaps you'd like to take the clergyman into the front sitting-room, Sister," Mrs. Budd suggested. "And you pop off up to your bed, Mabel."

She opened the door of the sitting-room and pulled the chain of the incandescent mantle.

"That's a bit more cheerful," she said, as the room was suffused with the sickly illumination.

Sister Esther Magdalene put a finger to her lips.

"Oh, she's asleep, is she?" Mrs. Budd whispered, with a glance toward the bedroom, the flickering candle-light in which was visible through the half-open folding doors that separated it from the sitting-room. "Well, I'll go down to the kitchen and put on some milk to boil. I dare say the clergyman would like a cup of tea before he goes out again."

"Thank you, Mrs. Budd, I'm sure he would," said Sister Esther. "I'll come and call you when he's ready, shall I?"

Mrs. Budd retreated pleasantly without being aware that she had been dismissed. When she was gone, Esther turned to Mark.

"I wondered if it would be you that Mabel would fetch. I nearly asked for you by name, but I thought that you might be out, and I was afraid of the least delay. She cannot live very long. She is one of our girls from the home. Her baby died, and she relapsed into sin. Violet Shoolbred is her name. It was a great grief to the Reverend Mother when we lost sight of her; but she remembered us in her illness, and sent the Reverend

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Mother a postcard. Look!" Esther gave Mark a picture postcard with views of Margate on the back.

Dear Revrend Mother,

*I am very ill at 10 Redmans Terrace, Pimlico.
Dear Revrend Mother, I am sorry I never wrote
and told you were I was. Dear Revrend Mother,
can one of the dear sisters come to me.*

Your affec.

Violet Shoolbred.

"When I arrived here, two days ago, she was quite delirious, and I fear that she may never return to consciousness. But, Mark, her poor wandering mind is tormented by the thought of sin, and can you not give her Viaticum?"

Mark entered the sick-room and found the table prepared with crucifix and two lighted candles and communion cloth. Putting on his stole, he placed the pyx upon the table and genuflected. As he rose from his knees the sick woman sat up in bed and stared before her.

"Does she know how to make her confession?" Mark whispered to Esther.

"Her mind is troubled," Esther replied; "but she is not conscious of our presence."

"Are you sure that she repents?" he whispered again.

"Oh, I am sure, sure. She has seemed to regret so much in her delirium."

"Listen," Mark said. "She is going to speak."

The sick woman began to talk rapidly in a harsh voice:

"Of course, as I say, I don't like to stay on here always. I mean to say, the Reverend Mother and all the sisters are very nice and kind and all that, but still anyone feels they want to be by themselves some time. I shall tell the Reverend Mother I'd sooner go back to business. I mean to say, I'm perfectly sure that Holland Brothers would take me on again in the hats. Miss Marshall always said there was no girl showed off a hat so well as I did. Well, dear, there's no doubt I was by far the prettiest girl in the department. I mean to

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say, they all admitted it. . . . Well, why don't you settle a regular amount on me, Arthur? I mean to say, you expect all and give nothing, if it comes to that. If you allowed me so much a week instead of me always having to wheedle it out of you we should both be happier. What's that, Gladys, lend you two quid? Hark at her, girls! She thinks I'm made of money. Besides, I wouldn't lend it if I had it. Well, it don't do to be always giving away hard-earned money, that it don't. . . . Kiss me, kiss me! O Dick, I do love you! Kiss me, my darling. I don't care about anybody, only you. I love you, Dick. . . . Hell then, you dirty hound; if you think you're just going to say good-bye and be rid of me so easy as all that, you're damn well mistaken. If I find you've been taking out that Gladys, I'll shoot you, Dick. Yes, you can laugh, but you won't laugh in a minute. God, aren't men the limit! . . . I'll have a whisky-and-lemon hot. Oh, girls, I wasn't half canned last night. I was absolutely blotto. I was really. Well, what of it? I think it does anyone good, I do. Well, here's luck, girls. Alphonso, bring another whisky-and-lemon hot, there's a love. . . . Well, if she dared show herself in here, I'd spit in her eye. Who is she, any old way? Yes, just because she's got hold of this Polish count, she thinks she's everybody. Gave her another lovely ring last week, did he? Well, if he did, he's more of an up the Polish count. Well, I can't see anything in her, I can't. Yes, she's nicely dressed, perhaps, but what's that? Anybody could be well dressed if they had a mug like him to pay for it. . . . Oh, I'm not going to get up yet, Maudie. Whatever for? So long as we're up the Dilly by nine, that's early enough. Make us a cup of tea. Oh, go on, Maudie, be a sport, and do leave anyone in peace and quiet. I like my bed, I do. It's snice. . . ."

The harsh voice subsided, and the sick woman fell back among the pillows.

"Pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy and sloth," Mark said. "I dare not give her Viaticum."

"But, Mark, just before you came she wasn't talking a bit like that. These are devils that make her speak

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like that. Pray for her, Mark, for I'm sure that she repents."

Mark knelt and prayed :

O Blessed Lord, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comforts; We beseech Thee, look down in pity and compassion upon this Thy afflicted servant. Thou writest bitter things against her, and makest her to possess her former iniquities; Thy wrath lieth hard upon her, and her soul is full of trouble: But, O Merciful God, Who hast written Thy Holy Word for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of Thy Holy Scriptures, might have hope; give her a right understanding of herself, and of Thy threats and promises; that she may neither cast away her confidence in Thee, nor place it anywhere but in Thee. Give her strength against all her temptations, and heal all her distempers. Break not the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. Shut not up Thy tender mercies in displeasure; but make her to hear of joy and gladness, that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice. Deliver her from fear of the enemy, and lift up the light of Thy countenance upon her, and give her peace, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

During this prayer the sick woman had lain silent and motionless, but when Mark and Esther rose from their knees she began to speak again, this time in the remote voice of one in the deepest sleep :

"I wish I hadn't have left the sisters. I wish I hadn't. I might have known that I'd have found my place in the shop filled up. Still, I don't blame Miss Marshall. The girl they've got in my place is much prettier than ever I was. It's to be hoped she won't be so silly. I hope she'll be happier than me. Perhaps Dick wasn't really so much to blame. I dare say I got on his nerves. And it was my fault in the beginning. I wish I'd taken the dressmaking job they offered me. It wasn't much. But I needn't have lived gay. I wish I hadn't cared so much about money, and I wish I hadn't gone on the drink like I did, and I wish I wasn't so bad. I wish I was little Mabel. If I was Mabel's mother, I'd take her right away from here . . . right away . . . away to the country. You wouldn't think I was a country-bred

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girl to look at me now. But I was. I came from Bedfordshire."

Mark told Esther to say the Confession for the sick woman; and when he had absolved her from her sins he gave her Viaticum. But she was scarcely conscious, and it seemed as if life was becoming so hard to hold.

"I shall be round to-morrow morning to find out how she is," Mark said in the sitting-room.

"I'm afraid she will be dead. The doctor holds out no hope."

"Poor child!" he sighed. "I had a girl at Galton who might have come to this; but I only heard from her yesterday to ask if I would be godfather to her second boy. She is happily married. I'm going to Wych for a long stay next week. I'm leaving here. Perhaps I shall see you on one of your brief holidays."

"Perhaps," she said. "Oh, Mark, I am so thankful about that poor girl. We feared that she was utterly lost. But the dear Reverend Mother's prayers are always answered."

"Listen," Mark whispered.

From the bedroom came the murmur of a voice immeasurably remote, yet clear as a bell:

Hail Mary full of Grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the Fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.

"That was not delirium," Esther exclaimed, crossing herself.

"No, no! The seven devils have gone out of her. Thanks be to God."

Esther's eyes shone with joy. Mark left the house and plunged into the mighty October wind, saying to himself on the way back to the Clergy House the psalm *Laudate Dominum De Coelis*.

Violet Shoolbred died soon after daybreak. Esther went back immediately to the convent in Shoreditch. Mrs. Budd was able to pay herself and all the funeral expenses out of the dead woman's few possessions. She promised Mark that Mabel should come to church every Sunday morning and join the Sunday school, after he had

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lectured her severely on her moral carelessness in regard to her daughter. He asked the new Vicar to take an interest in Mabel, and Viner, who was filled with the missionary spirit, was only too glad to pledge his word to do all he could.

"I'm really exceedingly sorry that you won't stay on as my senior assistant-priest," he said to Mark when the day came for him to leave the Clergy House. "I feel convinced that we should have got on splendidly together."

"I'm sure we should," Mark agreed warmly. "But I know that I ought to have some time in the country. Not on my own account, but because I feel an absence in me of spiritual force."

Viner smiled.

"It's not very noticeable. Still, I should do wrong to try in any way to over-persuade you."

They parted; and Mark left that afternoon for Wych-on-the-Wold.

CHAPTER XVI

CROSS ROADS

"It will soon be the thirteenth anniversary of your induction to Wych," Mark reminded the Rector, when they were all gathered in the drawing-room after dinner on the night of his arrival.

"And now here is Mark quite an elderly cleric," Miriam declared, looking up with a smile from the flowered arm-chair in which she sat stroking the great yellow Persian cat that was purring loudly upon her knee.

"I'm most interested to hear about Mark's meeting dear Esther like that," said old Mrs. Ogilvie, who was buried in a game of patience. "Ten on knave, nine on ten. That's a little better. But the congestion is still terrible. Most interested. Dear child! I had the gravest doubts once of her suitability for a sisterhood, but I was wrong. Queen on king, which gives me that six I've been wanting all this time. Well, I believe I shall get it out after all. And you thought she was looking well, Mark? When she was here last June, I thought that she was looking a little tired. But the air of Shoreditch must be very, very exhausting indeed. At last I can get that wretched king up. Bravo! Bravo!"

"I don't fancy that the air of Pimlico is too bracing," the Rector put in. "I think that it was high time you gave the country a chance, Mark. You must stay at least six months. I can give you plenty of work to do."

"My dear Stephen," the old lady protested, "why not let the poor boy have a real rest? He was always a very lean boy, but now he is looking positively gaunt. Bother that wretched two! It's hopelessly buried."

Mark smiled to himself at the thought of being overworked in Wych, and, rising from his chair, he went

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over and pulled back the curtain to look out at the quiet moonlight.

"A touch of frost," he said. "I can smell it through the panes."

He let the curtain fall back into its place and re-entered the room, as it were, to rejoice again in the crackling fire and golden lamplight, in the aromatic perfume of pot-pourri mingling with the faint incense from the burning logs, and most of all in that placid company of friends and benefactors, with whom he should always feel a boy. How unchanged they were! To revisit them was to behold hanging upon the same wall in the same place that picture which had coloured one's earlier days with so many romantic daydreams.

"Yes, I'm afraid this frost means the end of mother's dahlias," said the Rector.

"My dear Stephen, they've been over a fortnight. I've only been waiting for Wyatt to cut them down. Of course that wretched king would do that. Oh dear, oh dear, how very cruel! Yes, the dahlias have been looking like old rags this fortnight and more. Talking of sisterhoods," the old lady went on, "you'll be interested to hear that Monica Grey has taken final vows."

"Oh, but she had done that two years ago," Mark laughed. "If that's the latest news in Wych, you *have* been having a quiet time lately."

"Well, your visits are so few and far between, my dear boy," the old lady said, "that it's difficult to know what has been happening since you were last here. Did I tell you that I had the most astonishing sequence of eleven with *Miss Milligan*? Yes, she came out eleven times running."

"No, I hadn't heard that. Now that is something like news," Mark laughed.

"Yes, eleven times. It was most extraordinary. I drove down in the chaise to tell Mrs. Brydone, who has quite recently taken up patience. She could scarcely credit it. And the cards were well shuffled every time, were they not, Miriam?"

"Yes, mother, perfectly shuffled."

"Eleven times," the old lady repeated. "Let me see,

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I shall be seventy-five next birthday. So, it is most unlikely that I shall ever excel that record. Eleven times! But the twelfth time I was checked by two disgusting fives."

"And how is the rest of the Grey family?" Mark inquired.

"Why, Mr. Grey works as hard as ever in his garden. That talkative Birdwood is still with him. He has been engrossed in primulas lately. But I find that as I get older I prefer large flowers—yes, large flowers that grow on a level with one's face. The Fords have come back from India. Margaret didn't like being separated so much from Richard, and I think she was quite right. India was impossible for the children. However, Richard has got a splendid job in Scotland, building some new bridge. So, everything turned out quite for the best. Old Mr. Ford was telling me all about it the other day, when I drove down to Little Fairfield to take tea with him."

"And Pauline, how is she?" Mark inquired.

"Well, she's at home. But ever since that wretched business with young Hazlewood, four years ago, I've never felt that the dear child was happy. Not that she appears unhappy. But, you see, she hasn't married. My own opinion is that, as soon as she feels freer to leave her father and mother, she will enter a sisterhood. And somehow I cannot think it is healthy to have all the young girls in a neighbourhood becoming nuns. Of course, I know Stephen and Miriam won't agree with me, and for all I know you may not. But—oh, will you look at these three vile eights all on top of one another? Yes, I only wish the dear child could fall in love with some nice young man and be happily married. What is the time? Ten o'clock? Good gracious me, how late! You mustn't keep me up like this, my dear boy, every night."

Mark flung open wide the window of his bedroom, and leaned out to gaze upon the autumnal moonlight. It was rare to have up here on the wold so calm a night as this, and the silence of it after London sang in his ears. He rather wished now that he had taken a stroll

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down the village street before turning in. He should have enjoyed the contemplation of those decorous dwellings stark and still in the moonlight, and the imagination of their staid and seemly interiors after the frowstiness of Pimlico. How wonderful the columbary looked to-night, like an immense silver ciborium, and the steeple-topped tower of the church, with every crocket bleached by the moon to an almost ghastly distinctness against the velvet sky. It was odd that Ogilvie should have seemed disinclined for him to say Mass every morning, and he was glad that he had insisted on doing so, even if it had meant practically a threat to go away if he did not. He supposed that a daily Mass would reproach Ogilvie with his own growing indolence, for he was growing indolent, and now only said Mass on Sundays and Holy Days. Was it inevitable that all country parsons should gradually decline into laziness? Mark remembered a criticism of Dorward's years ago at Meade Cantorum, about the slackness of the country clergy, and their remissness in going to their duties. Dorward had not become slack, at any rate not liturgically, although he had been very casual about visiting his parishioners. A leaf from the pear-tree under his window, which had resisted all the early autumn gales, was over-burdened by the faint rime of this frosty night and fluttered to the ground. Mark made a mental note of the incident for future use in the pulpit as an illustration of surrender to temptation when least expected. How strong this air was! Delicious! He undressed quickly and fell asleep in the middle of his meditation upon the second joyful mystery of the rosary.

It was a milky October morning when Mark walked across the churchyard with Miriam, who was likely to be the whole of his congregation. St. Peter's was a very large church, almost as large as St. Paul's, Wychford, in the vale below, and that was the largest in Oxfordshire.

"Who usually serves the Rector nowadays?" Mark inquired.

"Harry Search often comes on Sundays at eight. But I don't think you will be able to get him on week-

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days; he has to help his father on the farm. However, I'll try to find you a boy from the Sunday school. I'm so glad we're going to have a daily Mass. It makes all the difference. I've done my best to persuade Stephen to say Mass daily; but you know, Mark, he's getting a very obstinate old thing nowadays."

Mark chose for his daily Mass an ancient chantry of St. Frideswide which still kept its old stone altar. There was very little stained glass left in St. Peter's, but it happened that the chantry was lighted by almost the only window left in the south transept, so that the altar glowed with rose and amber and amethyst. Here day after day Mark grew to cherish more and more deeply the privilege accorded to his priesthood. He felt that this solitary adoration of God upon the altar was a selfish emotion, and he tried to force himself to wish that there were always communicants; but with every day the rapture of this Divine intimacy grew keener, until after a month or two in Wych he gave up all pretence of desiring a congregation and determined to enjoy the experience to the top of his bent for so long as his conscience would allow him to rest satisfied with such an intensely individual method of worship. Besides, was it really worth while trying to spike up the Rector and his services and his flock?

Just before Advent Mark had an enthusiastic letter from Chator about a mission that they were going to hold at St. Wilfred's. There would be numerous conversions with God's help, and those who had fallen away from the Sacraments would be brought back to them more fervid than before. He had been lucky enough to get the very two priests he had hoped to get . . . and so on for pages of incoherent enthusiasm. For a moment Mark was on the point of going to the Rector and suggesting that he should preach a mission in Wych, but a moment afterward he was saying to himself that it would be useless here. There was not enough religious emotionalism in Wych to support one Wesleyan chapel. It would be a waste of time and energy to attempt to work up a fervour of devotion here. But when he read Chator's letter, Mark had a fleeting home-sickness for London.

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He decided that he would not stay in the country so long as he had intended. Glorious though this church might be, a monument of imaginative dignity, a triumph of serene expression, it did lack people. Like a whiff of orange peel in the pit of a crowded theatre came the thought of that mission at St. Wilfred's. The blaring sentimental hymns; the direct appeal to the emotions; the hot, sobbing women; the declamation of Jesus and Mary from the pulpit; the sticky children; the fretful babies; the earnest young sidesmen; the crucifer with rapt eyes; the clouds and clouds of cheap incense that was still not strong enough to compete with the odour of perspiring humanity; the life-size crucifix with very red wounds and most realistic agony. And they would be singing:

*Jesu, the very thought of Thee
With sweetness fills the breast;
But sweeter far Thy face to see,
And in Thy Presence rest.*

Had Franciscan friars in the thirteenth century preached such a mission here in Wych? Perhaps. And was it not his duty, inasmuch as he knew how to hold from the pulpit the emotions of humble folk, to persuade the Rector to hold such a mission here now? But no, what could be done in London with the responsive, impersonal London crowd could not be done here where the largest crowd did not exist apart from the separate individuals of whom it was made up and with each of whom one was too familiar. No doubt the Rector was right in his methods. He had had twenty-five years' experience as a country priest, and, though by certain standards he was undeniably slack, he was not disillusioned. He had not given up trying because he had discovered that English country people were hopeless, but because he was content with them as they were. And yet . . . and yet . . .

The spiritual deadness of Wych-on-the-Wold was not apparent. Because the shrine was so beautiful, it did not matter if the body within was corrupt or incorrupt or even if there was a body there at all. Soon after Chator's

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letter had made Mark ask himself if he had any right to remain buried in the country, doing no more than say Mass daily, keeping up with his offices, and visiting dear old ladies in cottages of perfect architecture, Mr. Grey, the Rector of Wychford, was attacked by severe bronchitis, and Mark was glad to find that he could be of real help in the neighbourhood by taking his services for him. This meant that he spent every week-end at the Rectory during the month of December and saw a great deal of Pauline.

"Oh, Mark," she exclaimed, "all the darlings are so excited by your preaching. Old Mrs. Geary said to me, 'Well, really, Miss Pauline, I was thrilled to the caw by the address the Reverend Lidderdale gave us last evening.' Oh, Mark, don't you love people who call you the Reverend Lidderdale?"

The 'darlings' to whom Pauline referred were the old women of Wychford in whose cottages her presence was incarnate Spring. One of them said to Mark, when he was adding to the duties he had assumed by a certain amount of parochial visiting:

"I had Miss Pauline in for a few minutes this morning, and really, sir, I felt as if someone had filled up my room with roses."

"She must be a great help to you, Mrs. Matthews."

"Well, since she took to coming so regular I've turned over a new lease of life, as the saying is. Yes, I'm a different woman."

There was in Pauline's heart a treasure of love from which any human creature, or indeed any living creature whatever, might draw, it seemed, inexhaustibly.

"I love mankind," Mark thought, "but I can only express my love by conventional service as a man or as a priest by bringing men to God, the fount of all love. But she is love. She possesses in herself an almost sacramental quality of conferring graces. I begin to sympathize with what at first appears the extravagance of St. Alphonso de Liguori. Great saint and great advocate, he divined the miraculous beauty of Our Lady's character and personality. He tried to express the inexpressible in his picture of the Daughter and the Mother and Spouse of

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God. One is embarrassed by reading *The Glories of Mary* as one is embarrassed by reading love-letters.

"Words written with fire may not be read in ink; and yet great poets have the power to turn ink back to fire. But St. Alphonso is not a great poet. As a writer, he is merely an eloquent advocate. The poetry that ought to have inflamed such a work as *The Glories of Mary* inflamed his life, so that besides being an eloquent advocate he became a great saint. The Church combined the advocate with the saint, and declared him a doctor. If only a great poet could express for us what the Blessed Virgin must have been! Our Lord's Divinity made poets of those who wrote His earthly history; but Our Lady, not being divine, could not achieve that. We look only just beyond the noblest woman we know personally in order to comprehend Our Lady; we see in the men we know personally nothing more than an infinitely faint reflection of her Divine Son. It is surely permissible to claim that from our own acquaintance with some women we are able to imagine Mary; but it is not permissible to argue our idea of Christ from any man we know. Not even of St. Francis could that have been argued. What is wrong with modernists is the attempt to achieve a Christology by appealing to the growth or the presumed growth of our knowledge of human nature. The Proud Fiend has whispered to them that He is not God at all, but that He is man exactly as they are men. Even now, after so much speculation in the Middle Ages, the Church allows a liberty of speculation about Mary that is denied and must always be denied to those who would speculate about her Son. And after centuries of speculation about Mary there came the deadly logic of the Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus*, for it seems to me clear that the dogma of the Immaculate Conception answered beforehand by the miracle of infallible revelation all the destructive biological and psychological criticism of the last fifty years. Yes, that dogma was indeed consummate Christology."

The more Mark saw of Pauline, the more it seemed to him that her character and personality expressed all that he longed to express of his own love for human beings. He lost for awhile the continuous assaults upon his hope

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by the overwhelming suggestions of futility with which the Evil One nourished that dreadful waste ground of the human mind where tares flourish and whence they seed themselves in the cultivated gardens that, small though they be, require such careful tending. He never ceased to thank God that first of all in the case of Carrie and Micha Chilcott, and again in the case of Joe Beeton, and once more in the case of Violet Shoolbred, he had been privileged to be the humble bearer of saving grace; but what flat failures his own efforts had always been! Rowley, an infinitely better man than himself, must have been tormented at the end by this sense of futility. What was God's purpose in allowing those dark nights of the soul so often to oppress the greatest saints toward the end? Even His beloved Son had not been exempt. *My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?* The answer was to be sought in the frailty of man, in his lack of endurance and vain show, in his cowardice and disquiet, for such ought not to persist against the assurance of Jesus Christ, *Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.* Moreover, Mark told himself, he had no right to expect to conquer the hearts of people merely because he was filled with desire to conquer them. He had not been endowed with those outward graces of charm of manner or beauty of person. He was gaunt and harsh and perhaps forbidding. Such eloquence as he had owed everything to sincerity, an illusory eloquence that written down would read deplorably. Yes, the failure was always in himself, and it was presumptuous to give way to a sense of futility. It meant that he was still conscious of himself in his fiercest attempts to do the Will of God. He was laying up treasure for himself, and was not rich enough toward God. He was taking thought for his life, what he should eat, and for his body what he should put on. But Pauline in her ways was as the lilies of the field. She neither toiled nor spun the beauty of herself. For what she gave she demanded no more than does the wild rose in the hedge demand of the passing wayfarer. And that rose somebody had worn and dared to toss aside. Mark had never seen Guy Hazlewood, to whom she had been betrothed, and the idea of a human being so in-

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capable of appreciation defeated him. Once or twice in village talks an attempt was made to allude to that affair; but Mark always showed such displeasure that the subject was changed at once. If Pauline had loved Guy Hazlewood, there must have been much to love; and Mark felt that he should injure her by joining in criticism. Whatever in his own soul he might think about Hazlewood, he had once been Pauline's. Wherever he might be now, she had once held him to her heart; and she would be hurt if the world reproached him.

"Pauline," he said one Saturday afternoon in February—for although the Rector of Wychford had been cured of his bronchitis Mark had continued to take the early celebration every Sunday, walking back to Wych and taking the second celebration there, in spite of old Mrs. Ogilvie's disapproval of such a long walk on an empty stomach—"Pauline, why did you tell me nearly ten years ago that I ought to go into a monastery?"

"Oh, Mark, did I? Then I think I must have been very wicked, because I'm sure I didn't mean it."

It was one of those February days when Spring like a sleepy child flings out from the cot-clothes a warm, dimpled arm and deludes the watchers into supposing that it is upon the verge of waking. The air was soft enough to make it pleasant to sit out in the garden, where a blackbird was practising his song and sometimes flying out from the shrubbery on the lawn to burnish his golden beak on the grass.

"Yes, I think you did mean it," Mark said, "because I remember that you clapped your hands at the idea."

"Well, I was very young, Mark. Only just sixteen."

"No, you were just seventeen," he corrected. "I was nineteen."

"Oh, how frightfully clever you are at calculations," she said. "You make me feel really frightened of you. You're too clever, Mark."

"No, Pauline, don't tease me. I do want to know why you thought a monastery was just the place for me."

"It's no use, Mark. You should have asked me ten years ago the answer to that. Perhaps I thought that it was the very place for you then. But, to tell the truth, I

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don't believe that I ever thought at all when I was seventeen. Anyway, I don't think that a monastery is the very place for you now."

Mark felt his throat constrict and his pulses quicken to an extent that rather took him aback.

"Why don't you think so now?" he asked.

"I think you're too fond of people. Oh, Mark, I wish you wouldn't ask me such dreadfully difficult questions. I was never a bit of good in exams."

"And it's high time I got back to people," Mark went on. "I intended to get a curacy immediately after Christmas, and here I am still idling away my time in the country."

"I think it's done you a great deal of good," Pauline declared. "You look ever so much better than when you first arrived."

"I think I'm feeling very happy at present," he replied.

"Are you? I'm glad that you're feeling happy."

"You sighed, Pauline."

"Did I sigh? I didn't mean to sigh. Perhaps I sighed because it's such an exquisite afternoon and because Father's snowdrops look so sweet."

"There's one thing I miss about the Rectory nowadays," Mark said.

"What do you miss?" she asked, looking at him quickly with frightened eyes.

"The chamber music."

"Oh, the music." This time she did sigh deeply.

"I first learnt to care for music in this house," he reminded her.

"But now that Margaret is married . . . oh, and I simply love being an aunt, Mark. I think I'm such a charming aunt. Don't you think I'm a charming aunt? I feel years older than Margaret when I go to stay with them. And Richard treats me with such respect. He never forgets to say 'Aunt Pauline' or 'your Aunt Pauline' to Richard the Second or John. Whereas darling Margaret is a little apt to talk about me as Pauline. No, we don't have much music now that Margaret is married and Monica is a nun. And Monica looks wonder-

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ful in her habit; oh, Mark, she looks simply wonderful. No, now that Margaret and Monica aren't at home any more we can't have trios and quartets, though Mother and I sometimes play sonatas together."

"Will you play a sonata for me after dinner to-night?"

"Oh, Mark, I don't know that I could." She hung her head. "I'm afraid of playing nowadays. But perhaps I might for you, as you're such an old friend. Except Richard you're my oldest friend. And as Richard's my brother-in-law I really could say that you are my oldest friend."

"Then will you play for this ancient friend to-night?" he asked.

She did not answer for a moment.

"How lovely those little blue anemones are!" he went on.

"We'll play you Beethoven's F Major Sonata, which is my favourite in all music," Pauline said breathlessly. "And now let's get indoors. It's getting cold."

So after dinner Mark sat in a Caroline chair with tall wicker back, and from the most shadowy corner of that arched and shadowy music-room listened to the music. It was not astonishing that somebody had called this the Spring Sonata, for what in all music was more expressive of spring than that opening Allegro? It was the very spring of *St. Mark's Eve*, and it told——

*Of unmatured green valleys cold,
Of the green thorny bloomless hedge,
Of rivers new with spring-time sedge,
Of primroses by shelter'd rills,
And daisies on the aguish hills.*

Why, it was from this room that he had walked back at dusk to Wych-on-the-Wold with those lines in his head on the *St. Mark's eve* before his seventeenth birthday, and when he had seen Esther hurrying before the wind down to Rushbrook Grange. The whole scene flashed upon his mind; and then, looking to where Pauline in a dress of rosy silk was playing this cold and poignant melody, cold and poignant as a thousand unmatured

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springs that never warmed to summer, Mark wondered if she was telling with her violin a tale of primroses untimely cut by chilling winds.

Now it was the Adagio in which all the regret for what might have blossomed from that cold and careless green of spring was expressed in the plangency of the violin speaking of the individual's grief, but which grief when the piano took up the melody seemed to belong less to the individual than to the very scheme of things, to be a grief inherent in every spring that was and is and will be. It sounded as if Pauline was deliberately making the violin speak for herself, as if the individual proclaimed that whatever the grief inherent in every spring, the grief of the human heart was always something just that much more poignant; and the Adagio came to an end with a long lamenting note that transcended art and spoke with the directness and poignancy of life. Mark wished, as the note died away, died away in the candle-light like a singed moth, that he had not asked Pauline to play; for when she played that Adagio it seemed to him that he had asked her some question about her unhappy love and that she had told him, and wept in telling him.

But now the Scherzo was saying that happiness was still possible. To be sure, it was a wistful happiness, a happiness chastened by past sorrow, but it was still the authentic happiness of spring. It was not the mellow tranquillity of autumn. There were times when Beethoven in his Rondos and Scherzos seemed to enter the jolly dance himself and to prance with an elephantine playfulness, singing *Ring-a-ring-of-roses*. But he was observing the delicate mirth of this Scherzo as an old shepherd might watch his lambs gambolling in an apple orchard. And as Mark listened to the way Pauline was playing this movement, it struck his fancy that she, like the composer, was standing outside the dainty tune and unable to join even in such a demure display of merriment, and that it was this aloofness of hers that made that mirth sound wistful. It was as if in the way she played it she could not bring herself to take part, although she was sad to feel herself outside.

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With the last movement Pauline picked up the threads of her torn life from the first movement and began to weave them together in a new pattern. *Allegro ma non troppo*. It was not such a gay pattern as the original; but it was by no means sad or dull, and it was woven closer than the first. It was a neat little pattern that was being woven by that industrious and busy little melody; and when there seemed a danger of loose threads hanging out the *pizzicato* clipped them off without any mercy.

"You played delightfully, Pauline. It was charming, charming!" Mrs. Grey declared. "We really must practise oftener. We must play the Schumann Sonata in A, and there's that charming Brahms one. I'm so glad, Mark, that you've asked Pauline to play. She ought to play. She ought to play."

Pauline smiled at her mother; but Mark thought that she smiled to please her mother, not with her heart. When he got back to Wych-on-the-Wold there were two letters waiting for him, which had arrived by the afternoon post on Saturday. He put them aside until after Mass with a presentiment that they were both important.

The first was from Nigel Stewart:

St. Cyprian's Clergy House,
Rockingham Gardens,
S.W.

February 12, 1910.

My dear Brother,

We're going to have another curate. Do come. I suggested you to Fr. Mortemer, and he thought you'd be just the clergyman we want. We think we're not sufficiently Evangelical, so we must have an Evangelical curate. You really must come. Fr. Mortemer heard you preach, you remember, at St. Chad's when we had the S.S.A. conference, and he was very much "took." He says that he promised you a title years ago, but that you'd scorned his offer. I think you used to come here with Rowley. I'm sure you've had enough of the country, and I'm sure you'd like us here. £180 a year and, of course, wonderful living in the Clergy House. You know how well Fr. Mortemer does us, so I needn't hold that up as

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an attraction. Besides, as an Evangelist you oughtn't to pay any attention to being well done.

I hear that poor old Whitmore is miserable since he went over to "auntie," but Andrew Hett is loving her. He already dreams of a cardinal's hat, I hear. Fancy a red-headed cardinal! But, of course, if A. H. makes up his mind to get something he usually manages it. Now do make up your mind to come to us. I'm writing this unofficially, because, as perhaps you know, Fr. Mortemer thinks that St. Cyprian's is the realization of one's ecclesiastical ambitions, so that to refuse him would mortify him beyond recovery. If, however, you'd like to come I'll tell him, and he'll write and ask you more formally. We're full of schemes for boosting the Movement. Congresses, conferences, services, societies, guilds, printing presses, pamphlets—well, if you don't believe in the C. of E. here you never will anywhere. Not that I'm accusing you of being wobbly. Moxon-Hughes says that our religion here is Roman, but not Catholic. Isn't he perfect? Mark Chator is bursting blood vessels in Notting Dale. I said that when you came back to London you and I would preach an intensive mission for him and simply rope in the wedding guests with or without wedding garments. He loves being a vicar; but the full flavour is not quite all there, because he can't afford a curate, which is sad, because he would so love being called vicar all the time. The people adore him. I hear that Viner is a success at St. Chad's, so all is well.

You've simply got to come here.

Yours ever,
Nigel Stewart.

The second letter was from Lord Ladingford, a local magnate, whom Mark had met once or twice and liked extremely :

Caldecott Manor,
Oxon.

February 12, 1910.

Dear Mr. Lidderdale,

The living of Caldecott has just fallen vacant, and I am writing to ask if you would care to accept it. The

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net income is £332 and the house is in excellent condition. The population is 210. If you will give me the pleasure of lunching with me on Tuesday next at 1.30 I could show you round the parish, and you will then be able to make up your mind. I'll send the car to fetch you, and unless I hear from you to the contrary I shall expect you on Tuesday. My kind regards to the Rector and his family.

*Yours sincerely,
Ladingford.*

Here was a choice of paths with a vengeance, Mark thought. He had for some time now been saying to himself that he ought to be getting back to hard work in London, and that if there ever had been any excuse for this lazy country life, there was no possible excuse now. But after Mr. Grey was well of his bronchitis he had continued to pretend that he had need of his help. He had lingered on through January, and now here was February half spent and he was still here; moreover, without having made the slightest attempt to look out for a job that would keep him as much occupied as he should be. If Nigel Stewart's letter had arrived without that other letter from Lord Ladingford, he should have written off gratefully to accept by return the curacy at St. Cyprian's. But might not the coincidence of the offer of a living mean that he was intended to devote himself to another kind of work? To what kind of work? Well, to prayer maybe, or perhaps to a richer study of theology. Two hundred and ten souls? It might be that God in His everlasting goodness and patience was giving him an opportunity to escape from that sense of futility. If he could bring one hundred, nay even fifty of those two hundred and ten souls to God, he should be doing something. Perhaps he was not intended to battle against the surge of London and that his true vocation lay in this countryside he so dearly loved. It would savour of discourtesy to his patron if he should refuse his kindly offer without, at any rate, appearing to consider it. Yes, that was certainly the least he could do, and to-morrow morning he would walk down to Wychford and tell Pauline about this offer of a living. How she would tease him about being Vicar of

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Caldecott ! She would pretend to be in great awe of him, and vow that the prospect of such dignity had already added years to his age and inches to his waist. Nevertheless, she would be glad. Would she be glad? Why, of course she would be glad to have an old friend in the neighbourhood. Mark wrote off at once to Lord Ladingford, thanking him for his offer and accepting his invitation for Tuesday. He put Nigel Stewart's letter aside to be answered when he had reached a decision.

Mark said nothing about his letters until supper was over and both Mrs. Ogilvie and Miriam had gone up to bed. He almost said nothing to the Rector, and was shocked at his own reserve with one to whom he had always told everything.

"Your post certainly was unusually rich," the Rector began, leaning over to poke up the fire and prepare for a long discussion of the two offers.

"Of course, my first impulse was to write off to Lord Ladingford and refuse," Mark said.

"Yes, of course," the Rector agreed, disconcerting Mark by the matter-of-fact way in which he assumed that the choice was a simple one.

"But on consideration," Mark went on deliberately, "I realized that it would be a great mistake to rush into a hasty decision."

"Ah," the Rector ejaculated, lighting his pipe vigorously and evidently waiting for Mark to lead the conversation.

"You were only my age when you went to Meade Cantorum," Mark challenged.

"My dear boy, please don't think that I am trying to influence you one way or the other, but I have thought many times since that I retired into the country much too soon. I know that you have been inclined to criticize my easy-going existence here."

"Oh, really. I hope——" Mark began, but the Rector stopped him.

"As a Catholic priest you could scarcely have done otherwise. Nobody is better aware of it than myself, and, God forgive me for my lack of faith, I fear that it is

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too late now for me to change. I fear that my arteries have begun to harden. I am fifty-two, Mark. Not a great age, but a difficult age to revive a spiritual power of which my own sloth has deprived me. Not that I was ever granted a surpassing skill with souls; but perhaps if I had not found myself the vicar of a small country parish at the age of twenty-nine I might have served God better. Your coming into my life and my having been able in the humblest way to help you a little . . ."

"To do everything for me," Mark burst in.

"No, not everything. Not nearly everything, and whatever little I did has already been repaid me a thousand-fold by That generous God Who is the Father of us all. Your perseverance has been my great joy and my chief consolation when I have reproached myself with my own indolence and sloth and carelessness."

Mark was embarrassed by the Rector's talking like this; but if he disclaimed the virtues attributed to him he should only accentuate his embarrassment and perhaps give an impression of false modesty. So he remained silent.

"Yes," the Rector went on, "I have offered your endurance for my weakness and your energy for my laziness. Frankly, my first impulse is to advise you not to accept the living of Caldecott from Lord Ladingford; but this impulse may be due to selfishness. It may be that I am in a way faced again at fifty-two with the choice I made at twenty-nine. It may be that I would have chosen differently myself now and that I am therefore anxious for you to choose the more active career."

They talked for a long time about Mark's future and about work in London and about work in the country; but the discussion meant little to Mark, for he had a conviction at the back of his mind all the time that when the moment came to choose definitely he should be positive which of the two paths he should take. It was perhaps with a feeling of the fruitlessness of this talk that Mark did not go to Wychford, as he had intended, in order to give his news to Pauline. If by any chance she should be discouraging about Caldecott, it would certainly upset him, for the more Mark thought about that living the

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more he felt that he wanted to accept it, and nobody would tell him afterwards that he had been wrong.

Caldecott was a hamlet about two miles from Ladingford, situated among the water-meadows of the Upper Thames in what is surely, regarding the perfect decorum of humanity's intrusion there, the vastness and splendour of the skies, and the strange enchantment of all that green hollow-land, the loveliest landscape in the world.

Mark was not used to riding in motor-cars, and the rapidity with which the fifteen miles between Wych-on-the-Wold and Caldecott were reeled off left him rather dazed when he alighted from the car, as if he had fallen into the reflected landscape at the bottom of a well and found on arrival that it was real. When his host came out from the golden-grey house to welcome him he was shy and awkward, and it was some time before he was able to do more than scatter monosyllables about the conversation.

Lord Ladingford was a bachelor who liked hunting, fishing, and first editions. His father had started a High Church tradition in the family, and the present lord had done his best with the three livings in his gift to maintain that tradition, which inasmuch as it interfered neither with hunting nor with fishing nor with first editions, he had not found irksome. Mark was puzzled to know what in himself had appealed to this blond, easy-going nobleman who spent his time between Tattersall's and Sotheby's. To be sure Mark liked him, but then everybody liked him. He concluded that he had been offered the vacant living because he was High Church, unoccupied, and in the neighbourhood at the time it fell vacant.

After lunch Lord Ladingford took Mark over to the Vicarage, which was a small edition of the Manor with a high-walled garden, ancient clipped yews, and a gate that led directly into that green hollow-land where the very willows bordering the many brooks that fed the young Thames hung on the bewitched air like wreaths of mist. Two miles away the tall spire of Ladingford church pierced the silver February sky; the Wiltshire downs lay upon the distant horizon like a bank of clouds; rooks were wheeling and cawing above the elms that surrounded the

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churchyard. Here and there was visible a stone bridge that spanned a hidden stream, bow-shaped bridges they were, with parapets on which a princess might lean to pore upon her picture in the water below. A flock of geese marched one behind the other with processional solemnity across an immense mead.

"Some of that would be your glebe," Lord Ladingford said. "It's very good pasturage, and a lot of it lets for as much as twelve pounds an acre, which, of course, is a prodigious rent so far away from a town. Though I suppose Ladingford considers itself a town," he added with a smile. "Well, I shall leave you to explore the church by yourself. Here are the keys. I expect you'd prefer to think over the prospect in solitude. Come in and have a cup of tea before the car takes you back at—what time shall we say?—five o'clock."

Mark explored the church, which was Early English, but with nothing to make it remarkable in this country of splendid churches. The late vicar, a widower with no family, had died suddenly a fortnight ago, and Ladingford had told Mark that the distant relation who had inherited his furniture was anxious to sell as much as possible to the new incumbent for whatever he would give for it. Mark was glad to hear this, because the furnishing of his vicarage had looked like being a problem. He did not stay long in the church, for what was really attracting him in Caldecott was the house, and the garden opening on that hollow-land. A line of verse kept ringing in his ears: *Christ keep the hollow-land all the summertime*. Was it William Morris? And was he even quoting it correctly? *Christ keep the hollow-land all the summertime*.

When Mark went back to the garden the rooks were still and silent, and sitting on a stone seat between two huge doves of yew he gazed through the open gate at that hollow-land. The clock in Ladingford church struck three. *A land where it was always afternoon*. There was no other sound when the vibration of the striking clock died away; no sound of lowing cattle nor of quacking ducks; no sound of human labour nor of human converse; no sound of wheels nor of horses' hooves; nor even of drip-

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ping water in this watery land. It was as if an immense bell-glass had been placed over the landscape, preserving it for ever in a warm, windless serenity.

Mark was suddenly aware that something was missing from the perfection of this enshrined hour. He had the restless feeling of expecting somebody who was late, and looking out through that gate across the hollow-land he was abruptly aware that he was waiting for Pauline to come walking over those stone bridges and across those meads. That was why he had returned to this garden, and that was why he sat here waiting. It was for her. And it was for her that he had put aside that letter of Nigel Stewart and had been whirled here in a car. And it was for her that he had told himself that perhaps his vocation was to be a country priest. It was neither for prayer nor for meditation, nor for the deeper study of theology, but for her. And he had not gone to tell her of Caldecott because he had been afraid that his dream should be shattered before he had dreamt it.

Mark pulled himself up as a man nodding on the seat of a cart pulls up a horse that is suddenly turning into a strange lane off the high road.

This meant that he was contemplating marriage. This meant that he was proposing to throw over one of his main beliefs in what was the duty of a priest. He was proposing to change himself from a priest into a clergyman. Ah, but not by marriage with Pauline. It was impossible to suggest that this offer of a living that would enable him to marry Pauline had been sent to try his constancy to God. Pauline could not be associated with a temptation. That was to blaspheme beauty, purity, truth, and love. But why argue with himself? There was only one question that counted. If Pauline loved him, this was his life. If she did not love him, this was easy enough to refuse. If she did not love him, this would vanish from his eyes like a landscape seen in childhood from a passing train, but for all the rest of his life remain in the memory more clearly and more intimately than a thousand thousand scenes and landscapes in which he had been a living figure. But if she did love him? The high walls of this garden quivered; the huge doves of yew trembled; the golden-

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grey house melted ; all the hollow-land flickered with green flames and the willows turned to smoke. Then let the world dissolve ! If she loved him, she was the world.

But he must know quickly. If she did not love him, then every instant imparadised in this enclosure was an outrage upon time. If she did not love him, that moment in which he had known he loved her must not be marred by the least change in this landscape, by not so much as the sound of leaf or twig nor the wink of a passing bird. Mark leapt up from the stone seat and hurried back to the Manor.

"I wonder, Lord Ladingford, if you could let me have the car at once? I've suddenly remembered that I promised to do something in Wychford this afternoon. May I write you my decision to-night? I'm so very deeply grateful for the opportunity you have given me. I shall let you know definitely to-night."

Mark, who had been dazed by the rapidity of the drive from Wych-on-the-Wold to Caldecott, was dismayed by the slowness of the drive back from Caldecott to Wychford. There were moments when the hedges and trees ahead of them seemed to be running away from the car. Mark's nerves were strung to such a pitch of acute perceptiveness that he was able to think he was counting the twigs in the hedgerows which ordinarily at the pace he was being driven would have been a purple blur. It was striking four when the car pulled up by the corner of the street that led to the Rectory. Mark saw, to his joy, that Pauline was walking in the garden ; and, as he hurried towards her, it struck him that she ought not to be wandering about without a hat in this raging wind. But when he reached her side and looked into her face and tried to ask his question, he realized that it was still the same windless and mellow afternoon and that his own heart and the blackbirds in the shrubbery were the only moving things.

"Pauline, I've been offered the living of Caldecott."

"Oh, Mark dear, it's the most perfect place. It's exquisite, Mark. Oh, and I'd love you to be a vicar. Oh, do take it, Mark, do take it. Oh, Mark, how frightfully exciting ! Oh, I must tell darling father. He'll send

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you cartloads of bulbs for your garden, and I'll come and help you plant them."

"Will you, Pauline?"

She looked at him, and in her sudden immobility it seemed to him that she was fading away into this windless February afternoon, fading out of this garden, fading out of that hollow-land, fading out of his life.

"Pauline, Pauline! You've guessed that I love you! Will you marry me, Pauline?"

"Mark, dear, dear Mark, I can't bear to hurt you, but I don't love you in that way. I couldn't ever love you in that way. If I could, I would, because you're such a dear. And it isn't that I don't want to, Mark. It's simply that I can't."

"Darling Pauline," said Mark gently, "I know that you would if you could, because you are love itself. And, darling Pauline, forgive my clumsy selfishness in having hurt you by asking for something that you couldn't give, for I do understand what a grief that must be to you. Darling Pauline, I don't expect I look as if I understood, but I do. Don't worry about me, please; I beg you not to worry. I ought to have known you couldn't love me, but I was suddenly dazzled and I lost all my judgment, and that's why I've hurt you in this clumsy way."

"Mark, don't talk about hurting me, when it's I who have hurt you."

"But you haven't hurt me, my dear. If you had been able to love me, I should have been so happy that I think my very pulses would have turned to bells and I should have gone walking about like a chiming steeple. But for one hour I had in my heart the thought that you might love me, and that hour will be my whole life of love."

"But, Mark, you won't refuse the living? Because that would make me more unhappy than ever."

"Pauline, please don't say that. If you want to be kind to me, I entreat you not to consider Caldecott. If you had promised to marry me, I should have accepted it, because I should have felt that with you it would have been the right place for us to be. But without you it would be the wrong place for me. I shouldn't be happy there and therefore I shouldn't be a good priest. I have another

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offer from London to go to St. Cyprian's, which is of all others the church I should like to serve as a priest. Therefore I shall do better there. God bless you, darling Pauline. I shall go to London to-morrow. I'll come in and say good-bye to your mother and father now."

"But you'll go on being my oldest friend, Mark?"

"Why, of course, foolish little one, always."

CHAPTER XVII

ST. CYPRIAN'S, SOUTH KENSINGTON

A CLERICAL wit once said that Drogo Mortemer had built up St. Cyprian's on the same lines as those on which his father had once upon a time built up the business of Hadley and Mortemer in Oxford Street; and if the implied sneer had been kept out, that would have been well observed. There was no doubt that Mortemer's success was largely due to the skilful way in which he provided people with what he wanted them to want. In defence of his system he might have pleaded that Catholicism itself was a sublimation of universal providing; and after twelve years' work Mortemer would have been justified in claiming that the appeal of Anglo-Catholicism was stronger at St. Cyprian's than anywhere else. He could have urged that except as a missionary force in slums the system of religion that he and many others professed had never been taken seriously either by the press, the public, or the authorities, until he had shown the way to get it accepted as a system that could not be laughed at. He did not claim to be a great spiritual force himself. In fact he made a habit of deprecating too much emphasis upon the spiritual force in the individual priest as liable to foster the congregationalism that was the real bane of the Church of England. If he attacked a bishop (and Mortemer's cleverness was shown not least in the way he always hit first any bishop whom he saw rolling up his lawn sleeves to hit him), he attacked him on his worldly side. In a way it was the same school of boxing as Moxon-Hughes's, but where Moxon-Hughes feinted at his man with an artist Mortemer floored him with a duke. In twelve years he had made St. Cyprian's so strong a force that he was nearly always able to drive a bargain with any bishop of the Southern Province; for

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if one of them objected to the services of a church in his diocese which were winked at in another, St. Cyprian's always went one better and set an example of rapid advance that embarrassed the whole of the episcopate. If Mortemer had been asked what was the secret of his success, he would have disclaimed his personal influence and ascribed most of it to his assistant clergy. This was to some extent true; but the credit for choosing those young priests belonged to Mortemer, and he chose them so well that he was able to leave his parish for as often and as long as he wished and be sure that during the whole of his absence it would be as efficiently managed as if he were there. This ubiquity of Mortemer's was a wonderful weapon. He disapproved of letters and always relied on the personal interview. There were occasions, as in the desertion of Whitmore and Hett, when all his efforts were fruitless; but the successes far outnumbered the failures, and the gravest crises were weathered by that dapper little priest with his courtesy that was so faintly tinged with irony, with his slightly mincing and affected manner that concealed an infrangible resolution, and last but no means least with that income of nearly twenty thousand pounds a year. One really could not blame the bishops for beginning to think that there might be something in Anglo-Catholicism after all, especially when Mortemer spoke of his churchwarden the Duke of Birmingham, or of how Lord So-and-so had had to give up acting as sidesman since he became Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs. At this rate a future Prime Minister might be handing the plate of St. Cyprian's, and without undue Erastianism. . . .

But Mortemer's greatest triumph was when he secured the consecration of his senior assistant-priest to the see of Rarotonga. Even the popular press was thrilled by such a clerical leap, and for two days it shed a romantic glamour over the Church as a career. But that particular young priest was worthy to be a bishop, and Mortemer's placing was allowed on all sides to be accurate.

When Mark went to St. Cyprian's, the senior curate was the Reverend Michael Heriot, tall, austere, fastidious, scholarly, and what is called enigmatic. He had been

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with Mortemer when he first went to St. Cyprian's, and in fact was one of the assistant-priests when Mark first met Mortemer with Rowley. He had left St. Cyprian's to be domestic chaplain to one of Mortemer's earls, and, after spending five years in the best ecclesiastical library in England, he had returned to St. Cyprian's as a liturgical authority equal to any in the kingdom. He was a product of the mid-nineties in Oxford, of which period he had retained what was valuable and discarded what was absurd. He was not remarkable as a preacher owing to a certain stiffness of gesture and hesitating precision of speech; but he wrote with a grace and humour and ease of style in marked contrast to his oratory; and while the forms and ceremonies and services of the Church were his chief labour and most enjoyed recreation, he had a nice taste in literature and had edited Crashaw and Vaughan with conspicuous taste and much perception. The weight of his liturgical equipment was used by Mortemer with not less telling effect than his personality, which was a compound of inquisitor, don, and scholarly aristocrat. He treated bishops with the superficial deference that a sergeant-major accords to a junior subaltern. He never let them forget the extent of his knowledge, but at the same time he was careful not to humiliate them. With most clergymen of the Church of England type he was tolerably polite and always urbane even when compelled to be openly rude. He had, however, what almost amounted to a physical horror of archdeacons, to whom he was without exception abruptly insolent.

The Reverend Cyril Nash, small, slight, bright-eyed, elfin, who, while still an undergraduate at Trinity College, had astonished the scientific world by his acceleration of the metamorphosis of the tadpole and followed this up by conjuring with the evolution of the axolotl, had come down from Cambridge with a reputation to which he added by publishing three remarkable monographs during a year's study at the Naples Aquarium. Within two more years he had achieved a European name as the most brilliant young embryologist of the time. And then to everybody's amazement he took Holy Orders. It was not likely that Mortemer would allow such a personality

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to escape St. Cyprian's if by any possible means he could persuade him to join his staff. What a hammer he was going to be for the heads of infidels, Mortemer chuckled to himself. And Cyril Nash certainly was. But if he was a hammer for the heads of infidels, for the heads of heretics, particularly of modernists, he was a pulverizator.

As Michael Heriot had sung :

*He nearly transformed Canon Hensley Henson
Into a neophyte of R. H. Benson,
When Canon Henson heard the way he smashed all
The modern theories of Canon Rashdall.*

*He showed, by knowing more about the weevil
Than Canon Rashdall did of Good and Evil
And so much more about the axolotl
Than Canon Rashdall did of Aristotle,
That in religion as in education
A little learning is its own damnation.*

Those of little faith derived much comfort from the sermons of Cyril Nash, for it was evident to many young men that heard him that if one who by the testimony of scientists knew all that there was to be known about the spermatozoa of lobsters and still believed in God, there was no reason why they who had to believe in what he told the world about spermatozoa might not without incurring ridicule believe in what he told them about God. In addition to his real distinction as an embryologist (not to mention an unusual amount of general knowledge of zoology, ichthyology, and even of entomology, to which he might have added herpetology if, as he said, he had not feared by doing so to achieve a more than prudent sympathy with that old serpent called the Devil), he had a charming way of imparting his knowledge. He was absurdly young in looks and in manner, and his undergraduate flippancy was a trap for sciolists, who, misled by the appearance of superficial greenery, always plunged into the pit of his profound intelligence and were impaled upon solid stakes of facts cruelly sharpened by his wit.

Nigel Stewart was Mortemer's understudy. It was

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his job to watch the social position of the Anglo-Catholic party. It was he who dined out, and it was he who by always refusing, after due consideration, the livings that were offered to him by noble patrons secured for his vicar a power of indirect preferment unequalled by any cleric in the Establishment.

Hugh Dayrell, the fourth of Mortemer's assistant-priests until Mark became a fifth, was the psychological expert, the authority on moral theology, the physician of morbid souls, and, as Nash once said, well acquainted with every version except the authorized version. Mark was repelled by his personality from the beginning of their acquaintance, and found it so hard to conceal his antipathy that he could not understand the way in which Dayrell went out of his way to cultivate his society. It savoured of a cat's obstinacy in seeking the lap of a person who has a natural horror of cats. Indeed Dayrell with his smallness, a smallness that was accentuated by the conspicuous smallness of his hands and feet, with his delicate walk and habit of only opening a door as far as was exactly enough to let him enter or leave a room without brushing against the frame, with his large, dark, reluctant eyes set widely apart, his glossy hair, his little pointed chin and long pointed nails, could not fail to remind the least imaginative observer of a small, short-furred black cat.

Mortemer had bought two houses in Rockingham Gardens and turned them into one to make his clergy-house, so that each of his assistant-priests could have two rooms to himself, in addition to which there was a large library, a billiard-room, a refectory, a parlour, a reception room, an oratory, and three committee-rooms. Not only did Mortemer pay his clergy well, but he also relieved them of any domestic expenses whatever. He himself had a pretty taste in wine and expected them to have the same. He kept a French chef in South Kensington, and a French laundry in Acton, not to mention a couple of cars, although his own taste was always to drive everywhere in taxis.

"You're shocked at our luxury," he said to Mark, who was not exactly shocked, but who was rather taken

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aback at the prospect of having to live up to this profusion of comfort.

"Well, it seems to me that I am rather out of place," Mark replied.

"Not at all, not at all. You are exactly the priest one wants to fill up a gap."

"But is there a gap?" Mark asked with a smile.

"Yes, there is. I feel that one just lacks a certain simplicity. Of course, I am not hinting that I wish you to be merely simple, but I was really most impressed by what I heard about you at St. Chad's, and I do hope that you will be able to bring the same kind of spirit to St. Cyprian's. We cannot offer you any work among poor or humble folk; but, believe me, my dear man, you will find plenty of scope here, both in the pulpit and in the box. Each of us has his own confessional, and we try to follow the system of the Oratory. You will remember how much stress St. Philip Neri laid upon always having priests in attendance in the confessional. We have penitents from all over England. There is, as you will have guessed already, very little purely parochial work here. St. Cyprian's, of course, constitutes a parish; but naturally one does not visit, or make the least effort to persuade one's parishioners into attending the services. One does one's best to give them seats, but the church is always crowded, although the pew-rents are quite exorbitant. Luckily, or perhaps one ought not to say luckily, there are plenty of empty churches in the immediate neighbourhood.

"Now with regard to yourself, I should not like you to make the least change in your methods of teaching and preaching the Catholic faith. We have all the talents, but we do lack simplicity. I am so anxious not to give you the impression of inviting you to do something as it were to order. But I am anxious to leaven our apparent, for it is really more apparent than real, our apparent worldliness. One doesn't suggest that you should try to emulate Father Bernard Vaughan, still less Savonarola, but a little hell-fire, my dear man, just a flicker of hell-fire would be, I feel really convinced, most advantageous to the Movement. Yes, of the greatest help. Occasion-

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ally, of course, we get a colonial bishop who is able to denounce the worldliness of London and the visible growth of paganism, and all that sort of thing; but the worst of the diatribes of a colonial bishop is that there is always a collection at the end for his own mission. Of course, people like to be told that London is in the running with Babylon and Sodom and Nineveh and Rome in the time of the Empire and Paris just before the Revolution, and the popular press likes it. It unquestionably adds a—how shall I express it—a *souppçon* of guilt—spelt with an i, my dear man, and without u—to the gingerbread. It gives a certain *ton* to the more *banal* sins of the flesh. But the collection spoils the effect, because naturally people feel that, if they really are as wicked as the sermon has implied, the bishop ought to be converting them instead of the Masai or the Bougainville Islanders, or whatever particular brand of heathen he is converting. Please don't think that I have any personal bias against colonial bishops. As you remember, one of my assistant-priests was only a short time ago consecrated to the diocese of Rarotonga, and I am myself the commissioner for the diocese in England. The Movement owes an immense amount to colonial bishops. If we had had to depend entirely on our own dear old pussycats, I don't know how we should ever have managed to raise the standard of episcopal functions. Yes, if the Lambeth Conference produces nothing else, it does create a spirit of episcopal coquetry. I believe the number of new mitres ordered after the last one was unprecedented, so my ecclesiastical hatter informs me. In fact, so many were ordered that I suspect some of the more Protestant of our right reverend fathers in God must wear mitres in the smoking-room, or hang them upside down above the episcopal four-posters for their wives' curling papers. However, all this is by the way. What I am afraid is that, owing chiefly I must admit to ourselves at St. Cyprian's, the Movement may be in danger of becoming merely fashionable, which would be very nice, very pleasant, very gratifying, if one were quite sure that the fashion was more than skin-deep. After all, what one wants is to make all people dependent upon the Sacra-

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ments, and thus to be sure that they are daily drawing nearer to Almighty God. So we have agreed that one requires a little more of the Gospel."

Mark was quick to recognize that behind all this elaborate and circuitous manner of speech there did exist a perfectly sincere faith and a perfectly genuine desire to bring the Sacraments into the lives of the people who exist in material comfort. What seemed at first something very like snobbery was only another aspect of the missionary spirit. It certainly demanded courage and optimism to set about the conversion of the rich, and a reading of the Gospels was apt to leave one with the impression that it was beyond the powers of anybody. One remembered such a discouraging comparison as a camel passing through the eye of a needle, and the advice to the young man with great possessions.

The more Mark saw of his new vicar, the better he realized that he loved the rich in exactly the same way as famous evangelists have loved the poor. He had a fervid desire that their outward wealth should not be spoilt by their inward poverty. He did not deny the danger of riches; but he thought that it was wrong to acquiesce in the opinion that there was nothing to be done with the soul of a rich man. It seemed to him terrible that all the power of gold should be displayed to conceal an inward corruption.

"There are moments," he admitted once, "when I have been tempted to consider our Lord's remarks about rich men as hinting at the beginning of a kind of cynicism in Him. One has a fleeting sympathy with the extreme kenoticism of Gore. Of course, it's an opinion that I suppress in my mind, but it does declare itself occasionally. I know that the explanation of our Lord's sweeping condemnation of wealth is to be found in His matchless realism; but I do fancy that even He wondered sometimes if something ought not to have been done for the wealthy gentile. Do you remember, Lidderdale, *Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes?* It's not quite a perfect

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analogy; but one is bound to admit that a great deal more has been done spiritually for the poor than for the rich; and though I am only too willing to admit that in almost every case the poor man is nearer to God, I am also a little inclined to think that the missionary who devotes himself entirely to the poor is like the artist who by a paintable person understands a person that is easy to paint."

"I'm afraid," said Mark, "that you think I am rather like Jonah who, when ordered to cry against Nineveh, took the first boat for Tarshish. But I don't believe I should sulk under a booth on the East side of the city if I found that my words had had no effect on Nineveh."

"Capital, capital!" Mortemer chuckled. "Under a coster's booth, of course, in the Mile End Road?"

One of Mortemer's ambitions had been to pull down St. Cyprian's Church and rebuild it; but its success warned him not to imperil that success by any breach in the continuity of worship. Externally, therefore, it remained what St. Luke's, Galton, had been—stock-size and stock-shape, a mere mass of builder's Gothic. On the inside, however, the rich little priest had lavished his money, and although one might have expected to find that such eclecticism of decoration achieved in the end nothing better than the effect of a museum, this was not so, chiefly because whatever treasures had been brought here from Italy and Spain and France were for use, not ornament. A certain amount of structural alteration had been unavoidable. For instance, the West front had been entirely rebuilt to accommodate an organ loft, and thus do away with that hideous procession of choir, acolytes and clergy from what looks like the boiler-room of a ship. When the organ loft was added, the opportunity was taken to build a baptistery underneath, which was an exact replica of the baptistery of San Donato in Zara, a miniature not more than thirty feet in diameter, from which the great baptistery of Pisa must have been imitated. This was the only copy in the church, and every one of the many paintings was indisputably genuine. The interior of the church was dark, because Mortemer had filled every window with ancient stained-glass, and had

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always preferred the richer hues of sapphires and rubies to the pastel shades and semi-precious stones of most modern glass. The general effect was more Spanish than anything, chiefly because all the woodwork of which there was a great deal had been brought from Spain. Mortemer had arrived in Granada once when a street was being pulled down for a new tram route, and he had chartered a special steamer at Cadiz to bring back a quantity of huge old *patio* doors which he had used for the roof of St. Cyprian's. The confessional boxes came from Spain too. They were all of the sixteenth or early seventeenth century, and they had been used as vessels of salvation without a break except during the voyage from Spain to England. No doubt in Valladolid they had been replaced with ugly boxes of chestnut wood, which, when new and unvarnished, gives almost as bleak an impression of æsthetic discomfort as even deal itself. There was one feature of mediæval England that Mortemer did not disdain. This was a rood-loft that included a small altar at which Mark always said his votive Masses in preference to any of the more richly equipped altars in the body of the church.

Mark was so little overworked when he first came to St. Cyprian's that he began to be seriously perturbed by the idea that he was leading a life of luxury and idleness. He asked himself if he might not have found more work by accepting the cure of Caldecott. Certainly he would not have been living in such ease as here. He wondered if his refusal had been sincere and not dictated solely by his failure to win the hand of Pauline. And then he began to ask himself if his desire for work was sincere, and if it was not mainly dictated by his anxiety to cure himself of fretting for the unattainable. He was not expected to preach intellectual sermons which would have meant a good deal of solid study, and he found that the emotional sermons which he was called upon to deliver were injurious to conscientious reading. He fell into the habit not exactly of skimming the surface of a book, but of reading it by a series of flashlight illuminations of the pages between intervals of darkness. In other words, no sentence that did not seem of value to a sermon made

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any impression upon him. His intuitive faculties were constantly cultivated at the expense of the rational process of the mind. His preaching reproduced this habit, for he relied almost entirely upon an accumulation of emotional and eloquent flashes to produce an effect in his listeners' minds that a steady light had all the while been illuminating the subject on which he had elected to preach. To be sure by frequent practice he learnt to control so skilfully his capacity for vivid and emotional exposition that after a year he was able to rely entirely upon the inspiration of the moment even to the extent of not choosing his text until he opened his Bible in the pulpit. Moreover, he had always an acute sense of his congregations, which at a church like St. Cyprian's varied greatly; and after a year he was everywhere in request as a preacher, so that he was apparently as busy a priest as any in London. But the disquieting thing was that he was always preaching from what seemed the stored-up impressions of his past life, and he did not feel that he was adding to that store in the present. Yet he was, within a year of going to St. Cyprian's, as fully occupied in the confessional as he was in the pulpit, and he felt that he ought to be aware of a development in himself. But throughout that first year at St. Cyprian's he seemed to himself to be existing in utter unreality, and he was continually asking himself if he believed in anything that he proclaimed from the pulpit or felt anything that he suggested more gently in the confessional. He was an automaton whose interior processes of thought and feeling were entirely artificial, but whose machinery was so perfect that the illusion of life was never lost.

Since that failure to win Pauline, Mark found that he was incapable of confiding in anybody. He wrote to her from time to time the ordinary letters that one writes to friends at a distance who have never seen one's present surroundings. He wrote to Ogilvie in the same way. If he talked to any of his fellow priests at St. Cyprian's, he made up with animation for his lack of interest in the discussion and, what was more disconcerting, for his utter inability to be convinced that it mattered one little bit whether he was interested or not. He tried once or twice

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to talk freely about himself to Nigel Stewart; but it always seemed as if he were speaking from the pulpit and letting one word suggest the next. No doubt many good lines of verse had been inspired by necessity to find a rhyme for the verse before, but no great poet had ever been the slave of rhyme. There was no visible sign of Mark's inward discontent, or not so much discontent as absence of content, for it was rather a spiritual emptiness coupled with a faint malaise, like the first pangs of hunger. Mortemer was enthusiastic over his new priest's success in what he was given to understand was a position in which failure would have been readily excused, such a high standard was demanded from the clergy of St. Cyprian's, South Kensington. Even with Canon Warri-
low, who was still his director, Mark could not lose his reserve, although Warrilow soon saw through the assumption of frankness and taxed his penitent with his artificial outlook.

"I am not trying to conceal my real feelings," Mark maintained. "I simply have no real feelings to conceal. That is the explanation of the change you find in me. It may be that I've become professional. I suppose that professionalism touches a priest as well as a writer or a statesman or a schoolmaster or a carpenter. That seems to me one of the minor tragedies of life."

"I don't think that a priest is entitled to become a professional," the director said. "It might mean that a priest had lost his faith."

"I accused myself of that in my confession," Mark replied coldly. "But you would not suggest that a professional priest had necessarily lost his hope?"

"On the contrary," said the director, "I should say that a professional priest had lost his faith, his hope, and his love. I should affirm that a professional priest had better be cast into the sea with a millstone hanged about his neck than offend God's little ones. I am loth to criticize Father Mortemer's methods, but I cannot help feeling that the importance he attaches to the worldly triumphs of Catholicism is liable to have the most disastrous effect upon individual priests."

While his director was speaking, Mark was wondering

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all the time if his remarks about Mortemer were completely free from the prejudice of jealousy. To a certain extent Mortemer had assumed the position in the Catholic party formerly held by Warrilow himself. He hated himself for being able to have such thoughts, but they came rushing, without anything to hinder them, through the bareness of his mind.

"No, I don't think that it's the effect of St. Cyprian's," Mark insisted. "I think that it's myself."

"But have you really lost your faith?"

"Not when I am preaching," Mark replied. "So long as I am performing my priestly duties I believe profoundly and firmly in what I am doing, but the moment I leave the altar or the box I do not believe in anything. I am not tempted by this or that heretical doctrine. I have no desire to accommodate dogma to the growth of knowledge. I am as sceptical of evolution as I am sceptical of the Resurrection. I do not believe even in the natural objects before my eyes, and if, like Johnson, I kick a chair to discredit Berkeley, I am as sceptical of the sensation that hard object makes upon my toe as of the chair, because I am sceptical of the existence of myself."

"It sounds to me like acute neurasthenia," the director said.

"No, I don't believe that it's neurasthenia," Mark argued. "If it were neurasthenia, by which I presume you mean some kind of blunting of the sensory nerves, some sort of mild paralysis of the brain, why should I have perfect faith when I am at the altar? If the one is neurasthenia, you might as well argue that the other is hysteria, which I'm sure you don't want to suggest."

Canon Warrilow crossed himself.

"God forbid," he ejaculated.

"No," Mark said decidedly. "It's impossible for me to accuse myself of loss of faith except at moments. If you withheld absolution from me this morning, I should believe profoundly that absolution was being withheld and I should suffer the most grievous stress of mind. Yet it is probable that when you give me absolution I

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shall walk out of this church and up the Haymarket disbelieving not merely in God, but in the red buses and in the tube station and in the lifts by which I shall descend and in the train by which I shall travel back to South Kensington. When I am preaching I fix my eyes on the golden columba that hangs above the font in the baptistery; but sometimes, if I lose sight of that holy emblem, my mind plunges into a darkness that can be felt, and I swim back through a surge of waters to connected thought by an effort that would not be less violent were I swimming back from death to life. In my daily existence I experience the same kind of annihilation that one gets from what one must call this stage fright in the pulpit, but inasmuch as it is not concentrated within a few seconds it seems less appalling, and the sensation is rather of groping one's way slowly through a sea mist along a cliff's edge."

"But you never had this nihilistic temptation when you were working at St. Chad's."

"There were signs of its approach," Mark said. "There were signs of it even at St. Cuthbert's. In fact, as you will remember I once told you, I had a spasm of doubt when the Bishop gave me the Holy Ghost. At the moment when his hands were upon my head, I asked myself for the first time in my life if God existed. But since then I always ask myself if I am personally immortal. That is the crucial doubt. Let me be granted assurance of that, and I have no other doubts. In the presence of the Blessed Sacrament the nearness of God and the consolation of His love make me oblivious of my mortality or immortality. I do not think about myself. I am lost in the Divine Presence. Then I leave the altar, and once more self becomes important. I search for evidence of immortality, and the evidence does not exist. I look at the paving stones beneath my feet and ask why insentient matter should endure so long and why sentient matter like myself should decay so fast. And I am afflicted with an intolerable sense of the preciousness of life, not merely of human life, but of the lives of animals and birds and insects and even of flowers, so that when I fling a bunch of faded flowers into the fire

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and hear their stalks squealing and gasping while the flames consume their moisture, it seems to me that the flowers are veritably in pain and are screaming out to be left with what life remained to them before I flung them into the fire. I have sometimes rescued half-burnt flowers until they have withered blossom and leaf and stalk, and even then I have flung them into my waste-paper basket rather than run any risk of hearing them sigh faintly in the consuming fire."

"Well, it seems to me, whatever you say, that you are in a highly nervous condition," the director declared. "If I were Father Mortemer, I should forbid your preaching for a long time. I can't help feeling that the amount you take out of yourself by preaching in the way you do, that is to say, by relying entirely upon your own vitality to meet the demands of the moment, is telling on your system."

"But these intervals of doubt were always my trouble," Mark said. "It may be that by such expense of emotion I suffer from them more unpleasantly than formerly. But that does not explain their origin. In fact, it may be that I am better able to contend with them by being so terribly conscious of them. If they came and went without leaving any mark now, they might come never to depart at all later on. Not even when I was at the altar. At least I am granted for a short time each day the supreme joy of being sure of God's Presence and of His Love. If that were taken from me . . . but such a darkness of the soul is too horrible to contemplate."

Shortly after this, when Mark had been fifteen months at St. Cyprian's, Mortemer told him that he wanted him to give up preaching for a time even in his own church, and certainly not to accept any invitations from other churches. As this recommendation followed closely upon a visit by Mortemer to All Souls', Haymarket, Mark supposed that Canon Warrilow must have made some allusion to the amount of preaching he was doing, particularly as Mark prided himself upon maintaining outwardly a demeanour that showed not the least trace of overstrung nerves. He was rather vexed with his director

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and inclined to think that his interference trespassed upon an abuse of information obtained in the confessional. At the same time his preaching activity was common knowledge, and he could not really claim that the Canon had exceeded his prerogative as a friend in commenting upon such activity. In June he went down to Wych-on-the-Wold for a fortnight's holiday.

Mark found that the company of Pauline cured most of his fatigue. Indeed, it was not a question of her company; merely to see her was enough. When he was walking alone in the long twilights of those midsummer evenings the wild roses in the hedgerows conjured for him a world of Paulines; and this was a world more real than the real world, so that for a while his soul surrendered itself to peace and goodwill. At the same time he reproached himself with harbouring a sentimental obsession. It was clear from Pauline's manner that she was relieved to find him apparently well and happy, and that even the nearness of him to her last year, when her heart had overflowed with pity for his disappointment, was much less now than then. He should have esteemed it cowardly to hint that he was not happy. He should prefer that she credited him with a superficial affection than that she should suspect what a waste she had made of his mind all this past year.

Moreover, it was not fair that he should allow one who had given him so much to take away more than she gave. He was allowing himself to be tortured by his own desires into a betrayal of love. To consider the world hateful because he had failed to win Pauline was going to destroy his value as a man and as a priest. If anything were still needed to shame him out of his attitude, he should remind himself that in proposing to marry Pauline he had renounced his conviction that a priest should be celibate. There were plenty of good arguments for the marriage of the clergy, but there was no argument to which he would have listened until now. If his overwhelming love for a woman had led him to change his opinion, and he had been successful in gaining the love of that woman, he could only have justified himself by the perfection of his life. But if, now that he had not gained

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her love, he made that loss the cause of a spiritual deterioration, he might accuse his love of being an unworthy emotion. Such a thought implied in his view of her a baseness that could not be tolerated.

In this mood Mark returned to London at the beginning of July.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CATHOLIC REVIEW

WHEN Mark got back to St. Cyprian's, he found everybody much occupied with a project to bring out a really dignified review that would represent the intellectual outlook of the Catholic party in the Church of England. Mortemer had expressed his willingness to finance the enterprise and appoint Michael Heriot editor.

"I should enjoy editing a review, Vicar," said Heriot in his precise tones. "There is hardly anything that I should enjoy more; but I should not feel a genuine editor if you were to finance the review. Forgive the slight upon the unbeneficed clergy, brethren," he went on, turning to the rest of his colleagues who were sitting round the table in one of the committee-rooms of the Clergy House. "Yes, I beg you'll forgive the slight, but really, Vicar, I should always feel much more like what I am, the senior assistant-priest at St. Cyprian's, South Kensington, than a genuine editor. I should like it to be the editorial sanctum, not . . ."

"The *ter sanctum* it would have to be called, if you were editor, Heriot," Nash interrupted with a laugh.

"I wish you wouldn't interrupt with your witty observations, Nash. I do not think that it is fair. The best tradition of wit aims at retort, repartee or riposte, but it never allows an interruption. I had quite a good joke of my own that I was on the very verge of making, and of course now it will have to remain mute and inglorious for all time."

Everybody begged Heriot to reveal his joke.

"A post obiter dictum is never a success," Heriot said. "My lips are sealed. But to return to serious matters, I do think that if this review is to be of any value there will have to be a kind of public guarantee fund opened.

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I should then feel that I was a real editor. If the Vicar pays for everything, it will be too clerical; when I reject a contribution, I shall feel as if I was pitching the offertory at the heads of the churchwardens."

"I agree with Heriot," said Dayrell. "It must not be too obviously clerical. In fact, I'm inclined to question the advisability of appointing him editor. Why don't we try to get some brilliant young layman?"

"Ah, no, I think Heriot will be exactly right as editor," Mortemer said. "How would it be to call a meeting before the season is over, and take the temperature of the Catholic public? One could get up an impromptu committee—the Duke of Birmingham, Lord Hull, et hoc genus omne. You know the sort of thing."

"I helped to run a paper at Oxford," said Nigel Stewart. "I remember that we were always having meetings to promote it. It was called *The Oxford Looking Glass*. By the way, how about *The Catholic Looking Glass* as a title?"

"My dear Nigel," Cyril Nash protested, "people would think that it was all about fashions in chasubles."

"Well, a good deal of it probably would be," Mark flung out.

"I feared thee because thou art an austere man," Nash quoted, laughing and shaking his head.

"Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant," Mark retorted.

"The obvious title is *The Catholic Review*, it seems to me," the Vicar said. "Now, cannot one draw up some kind of prospectus?"

"Doesn't one get promises of help first from likely contributors?" Heriot asked.

"One can always count on getting promises," said Mark. "It doesn't matter how many eggs one counts before they're hatched. It's only the chickens about which one is advised to preserve a decent pessimism."

So letters were written, and circulars were sent out, and cards of invitation were printed, inviting by name various distinguished and undistinguished Anglo-Catholics to attend a meeting under the chairmanship of His Grace

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the Duke of Birmingham, K.G., at which the Bishop of Tobago, the Bishop of North-West Matabeleland, the Bishop of the Ivory Coast, the Earl of Hull, Sir Charles Horner, Bt., the Reverend Canon Warrilow, the Reverend J. Q. B. Moxon-Hughes, the Reverend Drogo Mortemer, Dom Cuthbert Manners, O.S.B., the Reverend Michael Heriot, the Reverend Cyril Nash, G. K. Chatterton, Esq., Crompton Macaulay, Esq., etc., etc., had kindly consented to address the meeting on the subject of a proposed Catholic review.

"Of course, the etceteras will be the only speakers we shall hear," Mark laughed.

"Oh no, I'm going to speak. Nothing shall stop me," Nash declared. "I think it was a tactful move to invite Moxon-Hughes."

"Oh, Moxon is very keen on the idea," the Vicar affirmed.

The platform at the parochial hall did not look like being quite the galaxy upon which the Vicar of St. Cyprian's had hoped to focus the eyes of the meeting.

"Of course, you know, it's too near the end of the season," he lamented, when telegram after telegram expressed the regrets of one after another notable supporter of the scheme for his inability to attend.

"I don't think that colonial bishops ought to be influenced by the end of the season," Mark said. "It's rather flighty of them."

"Oh dear, oh dear, now the Duke has cried off," the Vicar exclaimed, after reading another telegram. "That's really too bad of him. What is one to do for a chairman?"

"Dayrell and Stewart and I will come and support you on the platform, Vicar," Mark offered. "And when we write the report of the meeting, we will comment on the large and distinguished sprinkling of unbeneficed clergy that was noticeable."

"I hope some of the literary gents will turn up," Heriot said. And, as the future editor spoke, another telegram was delivered to say that G. K. Chatterton was unable to be present.

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"He gives some particularly weighty reason, no doubt," said Nash.

"We shall have no big guns at all," the Vicar grumbled.

"We shall have Canon Warrilow," said Nash.

"Please don't go on being funny, Cyril," Heriot begged.

"Well, you must admit that it is funny," said Nash.

"It's not half so funny as it's likely to be at the meeting," Mark chuckled.

"You'd much better have let me stick to my original plan," the Vicar said.

"Yes, but everybody would have called it an extension of our parish magazine," Heriot objected. "Hallo, here's another telegram."

The Vicar opened it and began to laugh.

"Do listen," he exclaimed. "This is too priceless!"

Dear brother warmly support proposed catholic review suggest strong line first number action bishop kidderminster communicating two hundred and twenty mixed dissenters summer conference best demand ex-communication canterbury if kidderminster in southern province cannot remember sorry cannot attend meeting hope great success delighted have telegram read if opportunity tell Heriot am writing long nonsense poem for early issue hundred lines done very good

"Dorward!" everybody shouted before the Vicar had time to read the signature.

"Dorward, of course," Mortemer confirmed.

The meeting at St. Cyprian's parish hall compensated with its enthusiasm for what it may have lacked by St. Cyprian's standards in distinction. The hall was well filled, and nobody seemed to mind that practically none of the advertised speakers had put in an appearance. Canon Warrilow, who was in the chair, opened the proceedings and called upon the Vicar of St. Cyprian's to explain the position of affairs. After Mortemer had argued the conspicuous, the almost vital necessity of a dignified organ of Catholic opinion and Moxon-Hughes had made an eloquent plea for hand-made paper and hand-

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printing, and a revival of the true spirit of the old English guilds; after Cyril Nash had claimed that the Anglo-Catholic Movement was essentially modern, but not modernist, and therefore required an organ that would appeal to the intellect while it preserved the strictest doctrinal orthodoxy; after Michael Heriot had made a most elaborately allusive speech to which the audience listened in puzzled silence until they were told that the last speaker was going to be editor, whereupon they cheered vociferously; and after one or two more speeches from the platform, Canon Warrilow rose and invited any ladies or gentlemen present that desired to address the meeting to mount the platform and give them the benefit of their suggestions. On this a young man at the back of the room made his way through the crowd and prepared to address the meeting. Shrugged shoulders replied to those who tried to ask by lifting their eyebrows who he was. Presently he began to speak in what Mortemer vowed after the meeting was a pronounced Cockney accent; but Mortemer was not a good judge of accents that day, for when he heard this young man holding forth, instead of 'just the right person' he had hoped to hear, Mortemer was inclined to leap from the zenith to the nadir, and be perfectly sure that this was 'just the wrong person.'

"Ladies and gentlemen," the young man began, "I reckon that I've got what you might call rather a nerve." Mortemer winced and drew in his breath sharply. "Yes, I reckon that I've got no business to stand up here and start talking when there must be dozens of other ladies and gentlemen better able to talk than me. ["No, no," ejaculated a benevolent voice from the back of the hall.] I am much obliged to my friend for his kind encouragement, and anyway here I am for better or worse. Well, ladies and gentlemen, besides being an English Catholic, I'm a journalist, and what I want to say right off is that you've chosen the wrong name for this magazine. [Voice: "Query."] Well, I say you have, and I'm ready to argue the point with anybody here. If you call this review or magazine *The Catholic Review*, you're going to give the man in the street a wrong impression.

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["Shame! "] The man in the street has got it firmly into his head that Catholic means Roman Catholic. [Inclination toward a mild uproar in the audience.] It's not a bit of use getting angry about it. You may be sorry for the ignorance of the man in the street, but if this review is going to have any real influence it will have to take account of this man in the street. It won't have to be too proud. I'm open to wager that if you call this review *The Catholic Review* you'll find that ninety-nine people out of a hundred won't have the least idea that it has anything to do with our Church. In fact, I'm open to wager that many English Catholics who have not had the privilege of attending this meeting and who see *The Catholic Review* for sale on the book-stalls themselves won't know that it is a review for them and will suppose that it is a Roman Catholic production. [Cries of "No, no," from all over the hall.] It's not a bit of use your shouting 'No, no,' because I'm only speaking what is the solid truth. I'm assuming that all of you who've come here this afternoon have come here because you really do want to see this review put fairly on its legs, and that's just why I earnestly beg you to choose another name. For the moment I'm not speaking as a Catholic—as an English Catholic, that is. I'm speaking as a journalist, and I can assure you most positively that you've got a bad title, because most people are going to say that it isn't *The Catholic Review*. I think it's a pretentious name. [Loud and prolonged cries of dissent.] Thank you, I yield to nobody in this hall in my loyalty to the Church of my baptism; but the most that any of us claim is that we are a living branch of the Catholic Church. We don't claim to be the Catholic Church. We leave it to Rome to make such an exaggerated claim. Then why call it *The Catholic Review*? Why not call it *The Anglo-Catholic Review*? For that's what we hope it is going to be. Anglo-Catholicism is just beginning to be vaguely understood by Fleet Street. We can thank Lord Northcliffe for that. He's the layman that has done most for the Anglo-Catholic Movement. Before the *Daily Mail* [laughter and jeers] . . . I don't know what you're all laughing

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at. What's the matter with the *Daily Mail*? You all read it, anyway! [Cries of dissent.] Well, it's a paper that has done a good deal for Anglo-Catholicism, whatever you may say. I'm prepared to argue that the recognition we have got from the Press has been entirely due to the *Daily Mail*. The other papers may not like the *Daily Mail*, but they can't ignore it. However, I didn't get up on this platform to defend the *Daily Mail*. I got up here to speak as a working journalist and to offer you a bit of advice. ["It's not wanted!"] No, advice very seldom is wanted. But with all respect to the gentleman at the back of the hall who passed that remark, I tell him that if you think you can do anything with your review unless you pay some attention to good journalism, you're mistaken. You don't imagine that if all the ladies and gentlemen in this hall each buy two copies of the review that that amount is going to keep it running? It's not. You want ten thousand subscribers at least to maintain a good monthly or quarterly. And, to repeat once more what I said at the beginning, if you call this review *The Catholic Review*, you're going to give the public a wrong impression. I'm afraid that my remarks have not been very palatable, but I can assure you that they were sincerely meant."

One or two members of the audience clapped, but the majority sat in a cold silence, while the young man, blushing now that the excitement which had sustained him was over, took his seat in the obscurity of the back of the hall.

When the meeting was over, Mark managed to avoid the discussion of it by pleading an engagement at the other end of London. On the spur of the moment he took a ticket at South Kensington tube station for Hampstead, and walked up to the summit of the heath. The brazen July sky had changed with deepening afternoon to a milder radiance of gold, in which the city, all its windows sparkling in the sun, lapped like a tranquil sea the base of the green cliff on which he was sitting. This was Mark's first thought; but presently all comparisons began to seem futile, because, city or sea, it was equally unreal, just as of the children that played upon the

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grassy slopes and the glittering midges that danced about the air it seemed equally absurd to declare that these were children and those were midges. And how unreal had been that meeting to consider the advisability of starting a review to give serious literary shape to the aspirations and aims of the Catholic party in the Church of England! They did not hope to convert people by such a publication. It was rather to reassure themselves that they desired to see it upon their library tables. It was as if they were trying to claim that their point of view must be accepted seriously because it was embodied in a publication, the printing and binding and price of which was a guarantee that it could be accounted a rival of *The Hibbert Journal*. *The Hibbert Journal*, which was endowed to promote abstruse theological discussion, and yet was so oblivious of the fundamental usages of the English language that it appeared every three months and called itself a journal. There had not been a word about trying to instil into that portion of humanity which spoke English the necessity of holding fast to the revealed truths of Christianity. Well had this meeting been convened in a parochial hall, for the confabulation had been essentially parochial. He ought to have got up and suggested *The Parish Pump* as the best title for this new review. When that young man had tried to bring a little realism into the discussion, those befuddled jobbernowls could only perceive a slight upon a local custom. It was arguable, of course, that the so-called Anglo-Saxon race was going to dominate the world, and that therefore it was reasonable to suppose that under such a development the English Church would be the dominating ecclesiastical corporation. But in politics, as in religion, we were all heirs of Rome, of the Empire and the Papacy. It was possible to defend Anglicanism and Gallicanism as the expression of our extreme national consciousness; but was it really feasible to offer Anglicanism as a world religion? And if this were not feasible, was Anglicanism worth preservation, even assuming that all England should be converted to accept that peculiar aspect of Anglicanism which was accepted by those who had attended the meeting of this afternoon?

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Was any Church worth preservation whose official heads claimed that Catholicity was the equivalent of a polite comprehensiveness, and who even then begrudged both politeness and comprehensiveness to those who believed much while they extended it freely to those who believed little? When St. Paul compared the relation of Christ to His Church with that of a husband to his wife, he certainly never imagined such a perfect lady as the Church of England.

But why should he allow himself to be thus scandalized by the fatuousness of that meeting? He had known for years that such fatuousness was inherent in the English Church. If the tendency of priests was to become professional, it was equally bound to be the tendency of ecclesiastical laymen to become professional ecclesiastics. That ought not to affect him. Nothing mattered except that either God was incarnate of the Virgin Mary or that life was a dream between a sleep and a sleep.

"If space is infinite and time eternal," Mark murmured, "I am in infinity and I am in eternity. And if I am in infinity and if I am in eternity, I must be immortal. But if I am not immortal, then I cannot be in infinity and I cannot be in eternity. In that case space is not infinite, which is either inconceivable or else space is not: and in that case time equally is not eternal, which is either inconceivable or else time is not. And if space and time are not, then neither I nor the world nor the sun nor the stars are. In that case I must be God dreaming. But if I am God, God is. And if I am God, He is incarnate of me. But if He is incarnate of me, He could not be incarnate of the Virgin Mary. But if He was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, then life is not a dream and I am not God dreaming a dream. I am I again. Which is really so much more probable. But if both I and those children playing down there are immortal, then the Christian revelation is certainly much the most plausible revelation. And if the Christian revelation is truth, then Catholicism is certainly much the most plausible exponent of that truth. Therefore, I ought not to be sitting here surrounded by words that jig up and

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down in my brain as the midges jig up and down in the sunshine. For if Catholicism is truth, I have not one moment to waste for the rest of my time on earth, because I have taken upon myself the responsibility of spreading that truth."

When Mark got back to the Clergy House, he went up to see the Vicar in his study.

"I don't think that I shall be of the least use in connection with this review," he said, "so would you mind if I did not have anything to do with it?"

"But I never intended that you should have anything to do with it," Mortemer protested.

"No, but would you mind if I did not attend any more meetings or discussions about it? I feel that it is wasting my time; and when one feels that, one is apt to amplify a particular judgment into a general opinion. Don't misunderstand me, Vicar, when I say that the effect of this afternoon on me was to make me feel that the whole enterprise is a waste of time. I should expect Heriot or Nash to feel the same if I were to get up a meeting to discuss the advisableness of starting an order of preaching friars."

"No, no, I perfectly see your point of view, my dear man, and I think that you're absolutely right in taking such a line."

"Oh, and apropos of preaching," Mark went on, "I do hope that my holiday from the pulpit is going to come to an end fairly soon. I dare say that I am sinning by pride, but I do feel that, unless I am going to be able to preach, my utility at St. Cyprian's is a greatly qualified utility."

The Vicar walked rapidly up and down his room several times before replying.

"Yes, I know that you like preaching, and I can assure you that your temporary absence from the pulpit is a great loss to St. Cyprian's, not to mention a great many other churches. But I do think that I should prefer you not to begin preaching again just yet—at any rate, outside St. Cyprian's. You are doing a great deal of work in the confessional, and for the moment I would really rather that you concentrated upon that. You taxed

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yourself too hard, and I blame myself for letting you do so."

Mark did not feel that he could argue on this matter without giving his preaching an importance above its value. Besides, it was discipline to think that somebody else was right and to obey his judgment. Was not obedience one of the evangelical counsels?

CHAPTER XIX

MORALS

DROGO MORTEMER was probably wrong to debar Mark from preaching except in his own church, and to insist upon his concentrating so completely on his work in the confessional. Emotional fatigue had not been as dangerous as the moral fatigue that threatened Mark now that he was unable to find a sufficiently expressive outlet for his triumph or despair, now that day in day out during the whole of his thirty-second year he had to listen to the tale of human sin. At St. Chad's his duties in the confessional had been simple enough, although even there, toward the end of his time, the tendency had been for his stream of penitents to swell considerably compared with those of his colleagues; but here where he sat, still as a general practitioner, but as a general practitioner in a very fashionable street, the endless variations of human frailty slowly began to weigh upon his mind. In spite of a continuous effort to preserve his impersonality, and to regard himself as not much more than a piece of the floriated carving of the box itself, Mark found it increasingly difficult in the ordinary intercourse of existence to dis sever himself from a point of view of men and women that would soon have made ordinary intercourse an impossibility.

"I shall always be glad to lend you any of my books, you know," Dayrell suggested to Mark one day. "I have all Havelock Ellis and Krafft-Ebbing, and there's this Viennese fellow Freud, who really throws a new light on certain sexual impulses."

"The Devil goes about with a new light all the time," Mark said. "No, thanks, Dayrell, I haven't forgotten that to know all is to pardon all; but we can leave that ultimate toleration to Almighty God, for He alone is likely

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to know humanity as thoroughly as all that. Personally I think that all these books are dangerous to morals, because their tendency is to make us human beings too tolerant. They are all a subtle undermining of man's free will."

"But surely," Dayrell argued, "a priest has as much right, and more than right, as much duty to diagnose and heal the maladies of the soul and of the mind as a doctor to diagnose and heal the maladies of the body? Personally I have found my knowledge of psychopathy of the greatest value in the confessional."

"Have you?" Mark said. "I do not find that anything is of the least value except the grace of God working in the souls of my penitents to resist mortal sin."

"Well, naturally I am not questioning that," Dayrell replied in some pique. "But, after all, it is only right that we priests should avail ourselves of the enormous additions made recently to our knowledge of the pathology of the mind and soul."

"You keep talking about maladies of the mind and soul. I don't accept the idea of psychic diseases analogous to mental diseases. The only malady of the soul that I recognize is the state of being in mortal sin."

"But surely," Dayrell persisted, "we are bound to recognize that the conditions of modern existence have added a great deal to the difficulties of the individual soul."

"To a certain extent in certain directions," Mark admitted. "But the conditions of modern existence are the result of sin. So long as material progress is largely based on envy, jealousy, ambition, lust for money, greed of luxury, and all the other sinful motives that prompt man to advance, so long will that advance involve him in yearly increasing temptation. I accept the fact that modern industrial conditions tend to encourage vice, but what else would you expect when you examine by what modern industrial conditions are created? We have nowadays a lot of compassion expended upon heredity, but what is heredity except the transmission of Adam's original sin? The whole tendency of modern thought and modern opinion and modern manners is to extenuate the

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responsibility of human nature, not merely on the moral side, but equally on the spiritual side. From the moment that you begin to say that a certain dogma requires whittling down before it can be accepted by the modern man you invite a similar whittling down of moral obligations. Let a drunkard believe that he is less of a sinner because his father was a drunkard before him, and you may as well say that the Son of God was not Incarnate. *God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* That is surely quite enough. Either God did do that, or He didn't. If He did, then it seems to me that we can safely leave the ultimate verdict upon humanity until the Day of Judgment. Meanwhile, our duty as priests of God is to trust in His mercy and occupy ourselves with the means of grace that He has given us by His own merits, not by our own."

"You must be a very severe confessor, Lidderdale. I'm astonished that you have so many penitents."

It struck Mark that there was a hint of jealousy in the way Dayrell said this, and he reproached himself for ascribing motives to other people without taking care first to look at his own. If there was jealousy in Dayrell, there was probably more than a little pride in himself.

"I don't think that I am very severe," he replied. "I doubt if I am severe enough."

"Of course you get a great many females," Dayrell went on. "It's strange how much women are always attracted to the dark ascetic type like yours. I suppose they like the leanness and length and harshness of it in contrast with their own flabbiness and floppiness and sponginess."

Mark began to feel irritated.

"I rather object to the suggestion that my personal appearance has anything to do with my success or failure as a confessor," he said. "Of course, it would be idle to deny that there are a lot of silly women who do bewitch themselves into supposing that the wretched creature sitting there in cassock and surplice has, as a man, some

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dreadful attraction for them ; but happily those women are exceptions."

"I meant no offence by what I said, Lidderdale. Perhaps it is because I find that my own personality is antipathetic to women generally that I was struck by the number of women I notice waiting their turn outside your box."

"But all this talk about personality is such rubbish," Mark exclaimed. "The only personality that is worth considering is a personality like Rowley's, so full to the brim of compassion, love, and desire for other people's happiness that contact with it was a refreshment to the weariest heart, the feeblest soul. Unless human personality succeeds in achieving that kind of sacramental quality, and unless it completely divests itself of its human self, so that an ugly, a really very ugly man like Rowley, achieves a beauty more dazzling than any material perfection of curve or colour, any occupation with one's own or another's personality always seems to me an imaginable occasion of sin."

"I don't wish to flatter you, Lidderdale, but it may be that your own personality has just the kind of effect you admired in Rowley."

"What perfect nonsense!" Mark ejaculated wrathfully. "Mine? Mine that has lost any capacity for love whatsoever? I should indeed find the priestly task easy if I were granted that radiancy of the indwelling Holy Spirit in the temple of a body like Rowley's, a radiancy that shone out like the windows of a church on a night of storm and wind. No, my whole difficulty is that, far from loving people, I am growing to hate them, and the endless string of confessions I have to endure is making me hate them more than ever."

"How odd! You never struck me that way," Dayrell exclaimed in obvious astonishment. "I should always have asserted most positively that you had a great affection for people. You hide your dislike of them very well."

"That's what worries me," Mark said, "for I loathe pretending."

"But did you always hate people?"

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"No, I loved them once."

"Then did something happen to change your love to hate?"

"Nothing. I just withered like the fig tree," Mark replied. He resented talking in this intimate way to Dayrell, but he could not bring himself to be openly rude and he could not answer insincerely. At the same time he was anxious to avoid, if possible, any exchange of confidences. All the months he had been at St. Cyprian's he had felt that Dayrell was wanting to confide in him, and he dreaded above everything any kind of unofficial confession that would involve him in a discussion of Dayrell's private life.

"Strange," Dayrell said. "Of course, I'm still as fond of people as ever I was. Really in some ways too fond. It's curious how easily I am affected by . . ."

Mark looked at his watch.

"I say, Dayrell, I'm sorry to interrupt you, but I promised Stewart that I would say Evening Prayer for him. He's attending some fashionable rout or other." With which Mark hurried away to church.

Soon after this conversation with Dayrell there was one of those periodic agitations for the relaxation of the divorce laws, which occupied all the clergy of St. Cyprian's in their various activities.

Mark took the line that it did not matter how much the secular authority loosened the bonds of holy matrimony, provided that the Church did not abandon her own attitude towards divorce.

"If we use up all our own energy in trying to prevent this Bill being made law, and do not succeed in the end, we shall only remain in the public mind as a set of unfeeling bigots. If on the other hand we make no opposition, but take the much stronger and much safer line of refusing to re-marry divorced persons, we are in an impregnable position, because, after all, people who wish to avail themselves of the respectability that marriage in church confers will hardly have the impudence to claim that the Church has no right to make her own rules for her own children."

The others, however, thought that the Bill should be

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opposed politically, reserving the action of the Church as a last effort to protect the sanctity and inviolableness of Holy Matrimony. They considered that by nothing stronger than passive resistance the Church would expose herself to the criticism of the laity, who might claim that they had been lulled into a false security. The controversy was carried on fiercely in the Press, and the usual hard cases were produced of women tied to murderers, lunatics, drunkards, and that bugbear the genial and humane adulterer who would not throw plates at his wife, and whom therefore she could not divorce.

"What annoys me in all these arguments about marriage," Mark said, "is the assumption that there is a sufficient number of wretched women tied for life to fiends to warrant a change in the divorce law, while all the rest are happy and suitably married. My experience leads me to suppose that from the sacramental standpoint of marriage most people are unhappy and unsuitably married, because when they married they did not regard Holy Matrimony as a sacrament. Respectability has been substituted for holiness. People go to communion in the same way. Confirmation is another piece of respectability on a par with the London Matriculation or the Oxford and Cambridge Certificate. Penance holds its own as a sacrament, because people who use it use it as a sacrament, and those who don't use it think that it is definitely not respectable, in fact that it is positively improper."

"And how are you going to secure that people enter Holy Matrimony with a comprehension of it as a sacrament?" one of Mark's colleagues asked.

"You can't, of course; any more than you could be sure that every communicant is in a fit state to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. But that is the point I'm trying to make about the attitude of the Church. She says that marriage is a sacrament. That's enough. It's no good asking the law to step in and protest its sacramental quality. You might as well ask the law to put Holy Baptism in the same category as vaccination. The law might abolish marriage to-morrow. In fact I rather wish it would. We should know where we were

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then, and we shouldn't be pestered with the woes of people who wish to evade their obligations. I can understand and sympathize with a man or a woman who says, all for love and the world, even the world to come, well lost. But I do hate these respectable sentimentalists who want to be re-married in a church. Of course, as usual in the Establishment, the bishops are the cause of half the mischief. They go puffing down to the House of Lords to vote against a second reading of the Bill, but if it should pass and become law they would wash their hands of it like the Pontius Pilates that they are. It is to be left to the conscience of the individual priest to obey either the law or Jesus Christ. But not one of them will proceed against the individual priest that obeys the law in preference to Jesus Christ."

"No proceedings are provided for," the Vicar pointed out. "And I think you are exaggerating the cowardice of the bishops. The Bishop of Silchester is taking a very strong line with his clergy. So is the Bishop of Leominster, and so is the Bishop of Cambridge."

Mark used to get annoyed with himself for taking part in these discussions, which never seemed to lead to anything practical. It was like that serious review. Nothing had happened. The review had never appeared. It was like the Society of St. Anselm, which was to publish a new series of tracts for the times. Nothing had happened, or at any rate nothing that had had the least effect outside of quires and places where they sing.

The fact was that he had been wrong to accept a curacy at St. Cyprian's. He should have gone back to a poor parish. The rich might require missionary attention, but he was not the missionary to give it. He took no interest in their souls, and their sins he abominated, for they seemed to be the appurtenances of wealth, in the same category as footmen and elaborate dressing-cases and horrid little Pekinese spaniels with faces like penwipers. In spite of Drogo Mortemer, the Anglo-Catholicism of St. Cyprian's had not yet become a really fashionable craze like auction bridge or fox-trotting, and it did not look as if it ever would be; but it looked equally remote from ever being a faintly comparable influence to

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that of the Jesuits of Farm Street or the Oratorians of Brompton Road.

That old Spanish confessional box began to get badly on Mark's nerves. It became a haunted thing, so that from the heart of every oaken rose and pomegranate, from every cluster of acanthus and vine peered the demoniac visage of a deadly sin. There were moments at dusk when the interior was hung with heavy curtains of purple velvet, and when by some monstrous outrage on the imagination it turned into an ancient four-post bed, in the hangings of which even the ivory crucifix had at once a repulsive and a sensuous cachexy like a faded tuberose. At such moments the wood seemed to drip with hysterical tears and the air to reek with the subtly self-indulgent and lying and perfumed breath of feminality. At such times Mark could have set a torch to the old confessional box until he saw it crackling in the flames of the chaste and furious fire and all its hoarded memories being utterly consumed. Oppressed by the phantasies that daily grew more potent, he used to project his spirit into a polar waste, a moon-cold desert where the sun would hang like a lump of frozen honey, lighting nothing, and where even human lust would congeal and die. But he would scarcely have opened his mouth to breathe deep into his lungs the thought of such sublime cold, when he would lose the glittering blue and green ice-peaks and find himself back in this haunted confessional with the perfume of stale incense and burnt wax in his nostrils and with a woman's heavy white face languishing upon the grille like Lilith, foul offspring of the serpent's embrace. It was surely in some such revolt of masculinity that the lamia was imagined. Mark would have preferred a temptation of the flesh rather than this temptation to abhor the flesh, which reached such a pitch that he was filled with a horror of all created life and hoped for annihilation. He sought out Mortemer.

"Vicar, I'm afraid I shall have to resign. The fact is that I cannot stand any more of this intensive work in the box. It is giving me a loathing of everything that is alive. I'm afraid that my nerves have got the better of me. I ought to have spoken to you before,

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but you can understand that I was ashamed to admit myself beaten before I had struggled hard. I really cannot bear another confession. It even affects my reading. I picked up *Anna Karenina* the other day, which I once read with the greatest admiration and enjoyment; but I had to fling it down, for the effect on me was of being smothered to death in a woman's wardrobe. I found it so nauseating that the very paper pages seemed slimy to the touch. I feel that there is nothing fit to read except the Binomial Theorem, nothing fit to listen to except Bach's fugues, and nowhere fit to live except in a rest-house on one of the higher Alps."

"You ought not to have gone on so long as you have," the Vicar said. "And I think you ought to leave London as soon as you can."

"Or else return to a poor parish," Mark said. "I want to live with the poor and the humble. I long for some honest dirt and some real squalor, something that could, at any rate, be cleaned away by a dustman, not like the dirt of the soul and the squalor of the mind that one gets here. I really cannot stand the refinements of civilization any longer. The poor may behave like monkeys, but that's better than behaving like performing monkeys, which these people do. No doubt Dayrell would have a name for the particular mania that obsesses me to escape from the insincerity and affectation and mimicry and worship of riches, rank and show which is the outward visible sign of our inward spiritual corruption. When I first came to St. Cyprian's you used to encourage me to denounce the whole business from the pulpit. But what effect had it? None whatever. It only made me appear as big a mountebank as any of them, and you very rightly stopped it. But I am no more effectual in the confessional. At any rate, apart from my priestly power of absolution, I've lost any effectiveness I may have possessed at the beginning. I know that I am sinning against hope in talking like this, but not once since I have been here has Almighty God blessed my eyes with the sight of His salvation. I recognize the egoism of that remark; but that is how I stand, immensely conscious of my egoism, yet as utterly incapable as a man clinging

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to the face of a cliff a few inches above the waves' reach of being anything else but egoistical."

Mark had been talking at a great pace and with all the emphasis at his command. Suddenly he looked at Mortemer and saw him like a small bird with feathers ruffled by the wind and clinging to the edge of a swaying bough.

"I beg your pardon, Vicar. Why didn't you tell me to shut up?"

"Not at all, my dear man. One finds such a torrent rather refreshing sometimes. But you might keep quiet for a few minutes and listen to this letter :

St. Sampson's Vicarage,
St. Sampson's, R.S.O.,
North Cornwall.
August 11, 1912.

Dear Brother,

Our Squire, Colonel Greville, has a living vacant in the Rhos, for which he is anxious to find a priest. Do you know of anybody? Nancepean is the name of the place. Miles from anywhere and only £90 a year, which is the difficulty. The house is very jolly, but in bad repair. Lovely garden, but I believe much neglected. In fact by no means a plum. However, if you do know of anybody whom it would suit, I wish you'd write and let me know his name, etc., so that I can suggest him to Colonel Greville. We are not doing much here, I'm afraid. There's only one great advantage about Nancepean—the patron will be at the other end of Cornwall!

*Yours ever in O.B.L.,
Edward Carmichael.*

"Nancepean?" Mark repeated. "Why, that was my grandfather's parish, and I lived there most of my early childhood. What an extraordinary thing!"

"Of course, I remember now your telling me about your grandfather one day. Well, there it is, for I'm sure this man—what's his name?—Greville will be only too delighted to find somebody."

Mark hesitated.

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"It certainly does look as if it was intended for me," he said. "But I don't quite see how I could manage on ninety pounds a year, and keep up that house and garden. Of course, I am looking back at it with the eyes of a child, and it may not really be so vast as it seems to me in remembrance, but I'm quite sure that it will be vast enough for ninety pounds a year. No, I don't think it will be possible, at any rate unless the church were equipped, which Carmichael doesn't mention."

"Do you think you could manage on ninety pounds a year if the church was properly furnished?"

"I could have a good try."

"Well, my dear man, I am willing to take on the church, and I could give you some odds and ends of extra furniture for your house, and if you'll let me I should like to lend a hundred pounds which you can pay me back in twenty years. Please don't hesitate to take it, because it will just make the difference at the beginning. I can see that you'd like to accept this living, and I do feel that it is essential for you to get away into the country. After all, in two years' time you can always look out for something bigger. I shan't forget you."

Mark gratefully accepted Mortemer's offer to help him; and it was arranged that, as soon as a satisfactory reply had been received from Colonel Greville, Mark should leave St. Cyprian's. He was sure that the vacancy of Nancepean was an indication of God's will that he should leave London and assume the responsibilities of a country parish; and, being much fortified by this token of Divine favour, he expelled the demon of despair and prepared to throw himself into his new work with the liveliest hope that it would be blessed by Him Who had shown that it was His will that he should go to Nancepean. He remembered his last night there when Cass Dale (should he meet Cass Dale again?) had refused to come any farther than the top of Pendhu Cliff, and when he himself had hurried past the churchyard, half expecting to see his grandfather's ghost, and how he had seen the glowworm on the sprig of samphire by the tide's edge, and had been aware for the first time of God's love. That had happened close on twenty years ago. Yet how

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short a time it seemed, so sharp was still the impression of that night. Nancepean. It was really extraordinary that he should be going back there as vicar. How many vicars had there been since his grandfather died? Perhaps not more than one. Mark looked up Nancepean in Crockford. Here it was! St. Tugdual's Church . . . the Reverend John Jacob Morse. Mark looked up J. J. Morse in the list of clergy. Vicar of Nancepean, Diocese of Bodmin, 1893. Yes, he had succeeded his grandfather, and had been there ever since. Catholic? High Church? What? Where had he been before? Mark did not know anything of the churches he had served as curate. There ought to be some way in Crockford of identifying a man's religious opinions as one could usually find out in secular directories a man's political opinions.

Mark was thus engaged in trying to reconstruct the history of Nancepean from the time he left it through the twenty years' interval to the time of his return, when Dayrell came into the room hurriedly, and with one quick backward glance over his shoulder at the door he had closed behind him took his seat in one of Mark's arm-chairs.

"What's the matter?" Mark asked. "You look very worried."

"I am a little worried about something; I really came in to ask your advice. Hark! what was that?"

"Nothing at all. Why, you're trembling, Dayrell. Shall I ring and get you a glass of brandy?"

Dayrell shook his head.

"I don't want any brandy."

He leant over the empty grate, chafing his hands in the way people will over a blazing fire.

"Look here, Lidderdale, I badly need your advice. Hark! Surely I heard a footstep then?"

Mark shook his head.

"I suppose you've probably guessed what's the matter?" Dayrell asked.

To which question Mark shook his head more vigorously than before.

"I wonder why some people should be more exposed

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to horrible temptations than others," Dayrell asked gloomily.

"It usually works out fairly in my experience," Mark observed. "Those who are tempted by the flesh have usually nothing to fear from avarice or the meaner vices. Those who spend their lives battling against meanness in any form are usually immune to the flesh. Even in the sins of the flesh you find the same thing. The drunkard is usually less susceptible to woman. The more immoderate wenchers require no wine. The glutton is not much troubled by anything except his gluttony. Most of us have a ruling passion, and it is by what that passion is that we assess our liability. It is clear that if we are tempted to break a law of man, which is also a law of God, we shall suffer more obviously than those who only violate a law of God. Frankly my experience doesn't lead me to think that there is any great unfairness in the way temptation is apportioned. This sounds a very sententious and complacent way of answering you, Dayrell. Perhaps if you were more precise in one direction, I should be less so in another."

Although Mark said this, he hoped with all his heart that Dayrell would drop the subject. If he could have gone on talking he would have done so, because, however hard he tried to prepare his mind for sympathy, there was something repellent in Dayrell's attitude, crouching there over the empty grate. He could only have expressed in action what he felt by pushing Dayrell out of the room. With the prospect of Nancepean coming nearer and nearer he wanted to cut himself completely off from the nightmare that his curacy at St. Cyprian's was beginning to seem. But evidently nothing was going to deter Dayrell from involving a second person in his emotional spasms, because, as soon as Mark stopped, he began :

"Lidderdale, I've been asking myself lately if I had any right to continue as a priest, and I've come to the conclusion that I have not."

"What are you going to do? Join the Romans?" Mark asked.

"Well, that is one way, and the easiest way perhaps.

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Only I don't think I want to do it that way. I think that it would be more honest to renounce my priesthood on the grounds that I have lost my faith. Hark, that was the front-door bell, wasn't it?"

"Are you expecting somebody?" Mark asked a little irritably and with a desire to add that if Dayrell was expecting somebody he wished that he would go and expect the visitor in his own room and leave this one to its owner.

"No, no, I wasn't expecting anybody," Dayrell replied nervously. "But you don't offer me your advice. What do you think I ought to do?"

"It doesn't seem to me a question of offering or accepting advice. If you have lost your faith, it is obvious that the sooner you cease pretending to be a priest, the better it will be for you and everybody else."

"I've always found you sympathetic, Lidderdale," Dayrell went on. "I've always liked you better than the others here."

Mark had the greatest difficulty in hiding the exasperation he was feeling. What was the man getting at? Or was he getting at nothing more than a sickly desire to talk on about himself and his soul and his doubts and his difficulties?

"I've always found you more capable of understanding people," Dayrell went on. "If I were to take you into my confidence, I feel that you wouldn't turn against me. I feel that you really would understand."

"I don't think that I should understand better than anybody else," Mark said discouragingly.

"Oh, yes, you would. You'd be bound to. I always feel that you've had a tremendous tussle with your own feelings, and that though you've succeeded in mastering them, you are still able to sympathize with others weaker than yourself."

"Well, never mind about me," said Mark. "And I wish you wouldn't wave that handkerchief about, for it reeks of scent, and I never want to smell scent again as long as I live."

Dayrell's handkerchief reminded him of the confessional, and indeed Dayrell himself was managing to

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remind him most uncomfortably of one of his female penitents.

"I suppose you've never had any experience of blackmail?" Dayrell asked.

Mark shook his head.

"What would you do if you were blackmailed?" Dayrell pressed.

"Do you mean if I put myself in a position to be blackmailed?" Mark asked.

"Oh no, of course not. But if by an unfortunate indiscretion you gave an impression of something's having happened which didn't happen at all?"

Suddenly it flashed upon Mark at what Dayrell was hinting. He uttered an ejaculation of dismay.

"You don't mean to say that we're going to have a rotten scandal here?"

"That's why I want your advice. That's what I'm asking you. I'd do anything to avoid a scandal for Mortemer's sake."

"And for Christ's sake, too, one hopes," Mark interposed savagely. "I can't think why people like you take Holy Orders. You must have known that this sort of thing might happen. And yet you choose a life that almost more than any other is likely to put temptation in your way."

"I thought you'd be more sympathetic," Dayrell moaned.

"Sympathetic? Why should I be sympathetic?" Mark demanded angrily. "I sympathize with no priest or schoolmaster or scoutmaster who gets himself into trouble over this sort of thing. They have deliberately put themselves in the way of it. And obviously the worst of the lot is the priest."

"A priest is only human, after all," Dayrell argued.

"It's no good your talking, Dayrell. I don't sympathize with you. I feel not the slightest grain of pity for you. I loathe you for it."

"It's always easy to condemn when one has not been tempted oneself," Dayrell said.

"That's neither here nor there, for if you were tempted, by being a priest you had much greater help to

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resist. You must have been aware that your yielding would not merely involve yourself, but the whole Church with you, and thereby do more harm than if you were an obscure layman with no one but his own good name to worry about. As a sinner you can have my help and my pity; as a bad priest you can have my help for the sake of the Church, but you shall never have my pity."

"I've not been guilty of anything more than an indiscretion," Dayrell moaned. "I behaved foolishly, but that's not a crime."

"I don't in the least care to know what you've done, or what you've not done," Mark said as brutally as he could, for the sight of Dayrell rolling up that scented handkerchief into a ball, and then unrolling it and rolling it up again, filled him with rage for the mischief that such a contemptible little pouncet-box could inflict upon the cause of religion.

"You've evidently done quite enough, to judge by your talk about blackmail and your anxious inquiries after the front-door bell, to open the way to a scandal."

"I have, I have. I've never suggested anything else. That's why I've come to you to ask your advice. The father threatened to come here and make a scene. And I'm really not in a fit state to deal with a scene. My nerves are all to pieces. I'm quite willing to leave the country. I would have gone to-day, but I knew that if I did I should put Mortemer in a difficult position. I can easily have a nervous breakdown and be ordered abroad. There wouldn't be much acting required, I can assure you. But I thought that, if you would see the man, you might be able to persuade him not to take any action. He's a tobacconist. He's rather truculent, I'm afraid. In fact, he was very truculent with me."

At this moment one of the maids came in to say that there was a Mr. Brown who wished to see the Vicar on important business. Dayrell turned up the whites of his eyes in an agonized appeal to Mark.

"I told him that Mr. Mortemer was out," said Mary. "But he spoke very loud, and said he'd wait. Mr. Heriot and Mr. Stewart are both out, and Mr. Nash is working

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and doesn't want to be disturbed, so what had I better do?"

"You'd better show him up here, Mary," said Mark.

"Have you got any hope? Do you think you'll be able to calm him down?" Dayrell asked.

"I don't know what I shall be able to do," Mark replied gruffly. "Where are you going now?"

"I was going to my own room," Dayrell explained. "I thought that you might prefer to be left alone with him. He'll probably be much more reasonable if I keep away."

Mark was not at all anxious to spare Dayrell; but he thought that his task probably would be easier if Dayrell were out of the way, and therefore he let him go.

Mr. Brown was a burly, red-faced man of the contentious Radical type, who would doubtless have enjoyed harrying a parson for the mere love of the sport such prey afforded, but who had now the additional incentive of defending an Englishman's home.

"Are you the Vicar of this church?" Mr. Brown demanded. "Because if you are, I've come here to open your eyes to the way one of your curates has been carrying on."

"Sit down, won't you? Mark invited.

"No, I'm damned if I'll sit down in this house," Mr. Brown shouted. "I've only come here to tell you what I think of all you cursed parsons, and then I'm going right off to . . ."

"I ought to explain before you say any more," Mark interrupted, "that I am not the Vicar, but a fellow curate of Mr. Dayrell. The Vicar is out. I may add that I heard from Mr. Dayrell that you have reason to complain of his conduct."

"Complain of his conduct?" Mr. Brown shouted. "I should blessed well think I had cause to complain."

With which he launched forth into a minute account of the whole lamentable business, to which Mark listened in a white rage against Dayrell until Mr. Brown paused to take breath.

"Of course, I have no intention of defending Mr. Dayrell's conduct," Mark said. "And I can assure you

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that Mr. Mortemer, the Vicar, would not be less shocked than I am."

"I dare say he would," Mr. Brown put in. "And so you both damn well ought to be shocked. But you'll be more shocked before I've finished with you. I never could stand clergymen, no, nor clergymen's sons neither. A blooming lot of hypocrites, that's what I call 'em. I've been sticking cuttings out of newspapers in an album for the last twenty years about the goings on of clergymen. The album's nearly full now, and before I've done with this Dayrell, it'll be full and overflowing. What got me most was when he offered to write me out a cheque. That did get me. Write out a cheque for John William Brown, who's been known as an honest man all his life, and then gets treated by a hypocritical psalm-singing clergyman the same as if he was a low black-mailer? I wouldn't take a thousand pounds, do you hear? No, nor two, nor three, though I'm not a rich man by a long chalk. I wouldn't take a million. Now then!"

"I should never for one moment have supposed that you would," Mark said. "I should never have supposed that anybody could be damned fool enough to offer you money at such a moment."

"Eh? Oh, you wouldn't? Well, that's spoken out good and straight anyway," said Mr. Brown, obviously impressed in spite of his anti-clerical bias by Mark's directness of speech. "It's a pity that other little dough-faced swine couldn't have spoken out as straight."

"No, there's nothing I would offer you," Mark said. "But there's one thing I would ask you to offer, and that is mercy."

"Mercy to that——? Not me! I wouldn't show him a quarter of an ounce of mercy."

"Nor would I," said Mark. "I'm not asking for mercy to him."

"Oh, I see where you're getting," Mr. Brown chuckled sardonically. "I've got you, Mr. Clergyman. You're thinking of your own back. Well, if you're an honest man, which you look, even though you are a clergyman, I dare say it is a bit hard to have anything

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like this come out. But it's no good asking John William Brown to let off one clergyman for the sake of the rest."

"I'm not asking for mercy to clergymen," Mark said.

"Well, then I don't know what you're getting at," Mr. Brown declared.

"I'm asking for mercy to many thousands of simple Christian men and women."

"Eh? What's that?"

"I don't think that I need press my point with you, Mr. Brown, for I am perfectly sure that, however much you may hate clergymen, you don't hate simple people. And those are the ones that suffer when a clergyman's sin is found out and made public."

"And what about this chap Dayrell? Is he to get off scot free for the sake of hurting a few old women's feelings?" Mr. Brown demanded.

"I give you my word that Mr. Dayrell will not remain a clergyman. If you find that he does, you will of course take whatever action seems best to expose him. But there's no fear of that happening."

"Well, I don't see why I should pay attention to you, I'm sure," Mr. Brown said. "But—well—all right, I'll let the matter drop. I'm a bit ashamed of myself for being so soft and stupid. But—all right—I'll let the matter drop. Only he's got to clear out of it. I'm not going to be bluffed, you know. John William Brown won't stand bluffing. You treat me straight, and I'll treat you straight. Here, have a cigar, will you? These are some of my own stock."

Mark accepted the cigar and lighted up.

"This is good," he announced with relish.

"Oh, they are good," Mr. Brown agreed. "Well, that's a ninepenny. Over the counter that is. Though certainly they don't cost me ninepence. There's one thing, Mr.—I never had your name, I don't think."

"Lidderdale."

"There's one thing, Mr. Lidderdale. My wife will be pretty glad over this. Not that she's religious. Oh no, she's not religious. Not in any way. In fact, when we were first courting I made it perfectly clear that I thought religion was a back number. Well, when a

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fellow's read a bit of Darwin and Colonel Ingersoll, and one or two more of them, he can't go back to the old fairy stories, can he? Of course, I know you won't agree with me, because it isn't your job to agree with agnostics. That's what I am. An agnostic. I'm not an atheist. Though I've been called an atheist. Yes, my wife was hoping I wouldn't go too far in this business. In fact, she almost went down on her knees and begged me not to. But I was that mad to think that a . . ."

"Don't think about it," Mark advised. "Forget the whole wretched business."

"Now if there were more clergymen like you," Mr. Brown began.

Mark held up his hand.

"That's not fair, Mr. Brown. I may be the worst of the lot. No, no; you stick to your prejudices, or at any rate don't abandon them on my account. And thank you, not for Mr. Dayrell, not for the vicar of this parish, not for myself, or any of the English clergy, but for those simple Christian souls to whom you have shown mercy."

They shook hands on this.

"I wish I'd put a half-dozen of them cigars in my case," said Mr. Brown. "Good-bye, Mr. Lidderdale. Yes, my wife's going to be very happy to-night. Well, you know, that's always a pleasure, even if you have been married twenty years."

A week or two later Hugh Dayrell left Folkestone for Boulogne.

CHAPTER XX

SUN

COLONEL GREVILLE was not long in writing to offer the living of Nancepean to Mark, who wrote back at once to accept it.

"I hope you didn't say that you were going down to Cornwall at once," Mortemer said. "You ought to take a holiday before you try to grapple with the problems of a church and a vicarage of your own, not to mention the flock."

Mark said that he had thought of a fortnight in Wych while his own small collection of furniture and the additions made to it by the kindness of Mortemer were being transported to Nancepean.

"I don't want to go down there myself," he added, "until I go down for good. My reason is a cowardly one, but I simply cannot face the possibility of any discouraging incident over which I shall have time to brood during my holiday. There are bound to be discouraging incidents, but I should like to deal with them by active work on the spot."

"I quite agree with you about not going down to Cornwall until you go there for good," Mortemer said. "Besides, you know the place already. But I don't at all agree with this proposal to spend your holiday in Oxfordshire. It seems to me essential that you should get right away for a short time. That appalling business of Dayrell's must have given the finishing blow to your nerves."

"But I have nowhere else particular to go," Mark objected.

"Now let me give you some sound advice, my dear man. What you need is baking in the sun. Yes, you want all your humours cooked out of you. One can't guarantee the sun in this lamentable climate of ours. So,

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why not go to Italy? Why not take off that collar, buy a light suit, and some shirts, gaudy but not neat, and get away to the South?"

"I don't know that I should care for it," Mark said. "I can't speak the language, and it would be rather expensive. Besides, I think Ogilvie will expect me at Wych."

"Then go to Wych for a day or two; but buy your ticket to Rome before you go. Or, better still, let me buy it for you."

"Oh, my dear Vicar, I can't abuse your generosity to that extent. You're doing more than enough for me already. Really, if I go to Wych, that will be quite a good holiday."

But Mortemer intended to have his own way, and that evening he presented Mark with a small volume of tickets and an itinerary written out in his own exquisite hand on a sheet of notepaper.

"Here you are," he said. "You'll leave Charing Cross on Thursday, the 28th; you won't waste any time in Paris, but you'll get away the same night from the P.L.M. station and arrive in Rome on Saturday morning. You won't stay long in Rome. In fact, you'll only have Saturday and Sunday there. I should hear Mass in St. Peter's, if I were you, on Sunday morning early, because it may be just a bit too hot in the train that you'll go on to Naples, and when you get to Naples you can do what you like. Personally, I recommend spending the rest of your time either in Sirene, or perhaps still more wisely in a small village called Crapano, which is hidden away on the south side of the Sorrentine peninsula. You go to Sorrento by boat, and drive from there to Crapano. I recommend it as a certain cure for nerves. When you're tired of it, you can go back to Rome and spend the rest of your time there. But Crapano is what you want."

"But my Italian," Mark said. "Shan't I find it impossible to make myself understood in such a remote spot?"

"Italian would be very little use to you in Crapano, for scarcely a soul in the place speaks Italian. On the other hand, you're sure to find several who speak

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American. Besides, the less talking you do on a short holiday like this the better."

Mark was not sorry to have the matter taken out of his hands by the kindness of dear little Mortemer, and when he arrived in Wych he found that Ogilvie approved very much of the plan.

"I've always felt that it was selfish of us to encourage you to spend all your holidays here," the Rector said. "And so you're going to Nancepean. How strangely things fall out! But £90 a year is not much. In fact, it's not enough. I feel rather guilty in helping to dissuade you from accepting Caldecott. That was over £300, I rememeber. However, I could manage to stump up another £50 a year without material damage to my prospects here."

"Oh, no, no; I'd rather not accept it, Rector. Mortemer has offered to equip the church, which was my main difficulty, and has most kindly lent me £100, repayable in twenty years, not to mention providing me with a certain amount of furniture and this holiday in Italy. It must be jolly to have lots of money and spend it all on other people as he does. But he can afford it, and you can't. Moreover, I shall feel happier living as a poor man. I can't help hoping that my poverty will count for something in the eyes of the people there."

The Rector tried not to look doubtful.

"It ought to," he agreed. "But the tradition among country folk is that the parson is a pale reflection of the squire and to be treated as such."

"There's no squire in Nancepean," Mark said. "Colonel Greville is at the other end of the Duchy, and I don't remember anything like a big house for miles round. By the way, I hope you don't still think that it's a mistake for me to accept a country living at thirty-one. I assure you that if I find I'm getting slack I shall give it up. But I don't fancy that I shall be so comfortable as all that. That's one reason why I'm glad that the living is such a poor one."

"My dear boy, I realized from your letters all this year that you were finding the work at St. Cyprian's too much of a strain on your emotions, and even if you were

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to discover that Nancepean was just a long holiday, I should encourage you to go there."

"I want to be with poor people again," Mark said. "At St. Cyprian's religion was a mental luxury, and I want religion to be bread for the hungry soul. At St. Cyprian's it was caviare or *pâté-de-foie-gras*. And I don't think that anybody there was hungry physically, mentally, or spiritually. I dare say that I am exaggerating and that there were many who truly desired God. But looking back at my time there, even after less than twenty-four hours, I perceive it as a mere waste of time, because I cannot claim with assurance that I helped one individual to be at rest in our Blessed Lord, to be as one dead to this world, and to live only in Him."

"I do hope, my dear Mark, that Nancepean is not going to be another disappointment. I so fear that your memory of it as the place where you spent the happiest years of your childhood may have coloured it with a false enchantment. I may be wrong, but it seems to me that you are going to Nancepean rather more for what Nancepean can do for you than for what you can do for Nancepean."

"Perhaps you're right," Mark admitted. "And yet I don't think that Nancepean will be able to do much for me if I can do nothing for it. However, let's leave the people out of it for the moment. I am quite confident that the cliffs and the sea and the valleys and that little stream which unfolds like a silver fan when it reaches the sands of Church Cove and joins the Atlantic, along the banks of which I have wandered and wandered as a boy . . . ah, yes, I am positive that all these will do more for me than I dare hope."

"Mark, what is really the matter with you?" the Rector asked suddenly, leaning forward and gazing at him intensely. "What have you lost that you are trying to find again?"

"Don't ask me, Rector, for I ask myself that question many times daily, but I cannot answer it even to my innermost self. Sometimes I think that I have lost my faith; sometimes I say that I have lost my hope; sometimes I fear that I have lost my love. And sometimes I wonder

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if I have not lost all three. Perhaps that is why nowadays I want more from people. Perhaps I am asking them to restore to me my faith, my hope, and my love, and perhaps I am deceiving myself when I try to think that I want to give them my faith, and my hope, and my love. Well, if these are only humours, we shall see if they are got rid of by Mortemer's prescription. I must admit that ever since he talked to me about the sun I have felt a longing to lie roasting, with the sky like a hot blue velvet canopy overhead, and the sun really there, oh, yes, most undoubtedly there. A glorious golden blazing fact ! ”

When Mark put on lay attire he felt every bit as self-conscious for a time as he had felt when he first put on clerical attire. Indeed, he felt as much more self-conscious as a man would feel at being undressed in a crowd than one who was overdressed. It seemed to him that everybody must recognize him as a parson and be wondering what he was up to, walking about in a light grey flannel suit and a pink shirt with a turned-down collar. His next worry was that the first person he met on the continent would be Dayrell. And if it were, Dayrell would be sure to stick to him as long as he could.

However, by the time Mark was in the Rome express he had grown accustomed to his grey suit and had forgotten all about Dayrell ; and if anything further had been needed to make him more completely oblivious of either, it would have been the problems of manipulation that the sleeping-car raised. Even more than one's first shave, one's first experience of wagons-lits demands an instinctive capacity for doing the right thing at the right moment in the right way.

Mark was tempted to spend the whole of his holiday in Rome and not to travel another mile farther south ; but he decided that it would hurt Mortemer's feelings if he did not avail himself to the full of his generosity, and it was with some regret he took the train to Naples on Monday morning. But nobody can resist the Bay of Naples, or if he can, then all the simple and sensuous delights of this world must turn to bitterness and ashes in his mouth like the golden colocynth that flourishes in Gilgal. Certainly Mark could not resist that milky blue

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sea, across which the clumsy steamboat glided with such ease as almost to give an impression of being a thing of grace and shapeliness. When they drew near to the bosky shadow of the Sorrentine cliffs the pale blue water changed to a vivid ultramarine; and when the anchor dropped with a rich plop it had deepened to a liquid twilight of indigo.

Mark enjoyed the drive across the peninsula to the Salernian shore, in spite of the clouds of limestone dust that smothered him and the driver and the equipage and the olive trees that bordered the road. In the little varnished carriage he felt as if he were in a child's toy carriage drawn by a toy horse come to life, for the gallant little Abruzzi cob was decorated with such a panoply of charms against the evil eye, with nodding pheasant's feather on his crest, with patch of wolfskin on the saddle, with coral and silver horns, and jingling bells, that one could scarcely accept him as an animal meant for grown-up people. At last the driver pulled up at a wayside *osteria* called the *Due Golfi*, and after a good deal of difficulty made Mark understand that this was as far as he could take him, and that Crapano lay somewhere near the extremity of the peninsula, to which there was no way of access except by the narrow flagged path that wound its way through vineyards and olive groves. Mark began to feel that Crapano was as far away as those wraiths of mountains floating above the horizon beyond Salerno in a rosy haze. The shadows were lengthening. The limestone heights were ripening every moment to a warmer hue of apricot, but where the cliffs met the sea far below they were already flushed with crimson, and the dusk was lying upon them like the bloom on plums. However, the driver was full of energy and goodwill, so that finally, with the help of the innkeeper, a boy was dug up in one of the vineyards to carry Mark's bag, a terra cotta boy with the purple stains of the vintage upon his face and hands and arms and legs. It was quite dark when they reached Crapano; and Mark slept soundly in spite of the fleas and mosquitoes at the only inn in the place.

Waking early in the morning and looking out of his

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bedroom window, Mark saw the shimmering green-tiled cupola of the church tower, and sallied forth to hear Mass. While he was making his meditation afterwards in the cool morning silence, the parroco, a burly figure, came down the nave from the sacristy and asked him something in Italian. Mark replied in Latin, at which the priest's eyes brightened; and though Mark was slow both in talking and in understanding what was being said to him, they managed to understand each other well enough to sustain a conversation. The parroco's chief difficulty was to know what had brought a stranger to such a remote spot as Crapano. Mark might have found it difficult to explain in fluent Italian, but to assert solemnly in Latin, *Sol me portavit*, was too much for the parroco, who was bursting with that charming and intelligent curiosity of the South.

"Sol?" he asked in profound bewilderment.

"Sol," Mark repeated with a nod.

"Ah," the parroco exclaimed, "*ho capito! Volete dire che siete arrivato coll' automobile. Ma dov' è quest' automobile? Non ho sentito niente rumore della macchina.*"

Mark disclaimed arrival by motor-car and repeated that the sun had brought him to Crapano, whereupon the parroco gave the problem up and asked Mark if he should like to see the famous black Virgin of Crapano, who had wrought more miracles than any Virgin perhaps in all Italy, perhaps in all the world. He led the way to the high altar and pulled the cord of a blind, which rolled up and revealed a large Byzantine painting of the Queen of Heaven. This miraculous picture had sailed of its own accord from Palestine and beached itself on the marina of Crapano. Some rascals from Damacuta, a neighbouring village, had tried to carry the picture away to their church, but the Madonna had made herself heavier than lead, and they were unable to lift her off the beach. One account said that she cried out in a loud voice, '*Voglio andare a Crapano. Non voglio mica andare a Damacuta.*' But this account was not accepted as unquestionably authentic. It should perhaps be considered a pious addition. However, there was no doubt that those

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brigands of Damacuta could not steal her away, and that when the good folk of Crapano lifted her she made herself as light as a feather, the proof of which was evident, because there she stood to this day behind their altar.

"*Molto bella!*" the parroco exclaimed with deep affection. "*Molto cara! È nera, ma molto simpatica!*"

"*I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon,*" Mark quoted in English.

"*Non ho capito.*"

"*Nigra sum sed formosa,*" Mark hazarded, trying to remember the correct Latin from his office book.

The parroco beamed.

"*Bravo! bravissimo!*"

After this he took Mark into the sacristy, an oblong room lighted on three sides by many windows looking out over the sea, which gave it something of the air of being the stern cabin of an ancient ship, while the nautical atmosphere was enhanced by the votive models of many kinds of craft hung in glass frames upon the walls above the vestment presses. The parroco was pleased to notice how much Mark was interested in these visible tokens of celestial aid, and explained that Our Lady of Crapano, as might be expected of one who had herself experienced the dangers and terrors of the deep, was probably the most powerful protectress of mariners anywhere. He invited Mark to read some of the inscriptions underneath these votive ships. There were actually one or two instances of her clients being saved by her as far away from Crapano as the Pacific Ocean.

When the parroco had shown Mark all that there was to be shown in his church, he suggested that he should come back with him and drink a cup of coffee in his house.

The parroco had a small vineyard, to the amber grapes in which he pointed with pride, with the announcement that they were to be gathered to-morrow.

"*Cras,*" Mark repeated.

"*In italiano 'domani,'*" the parroco said. "*Ma in dialetto 'crai.'*"

"*Crai,*" Mark repeated.

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"Bravo! Fra poco parlerete perfettamente il nostro dialetto. Avete già fatto un progresso straordinario. Avete già imparato 'crai.' Quest' è già qualche cosa."

Nobody is proof against compliments upon his speaking of a foreign language. Although he modestly disclaimed that extraordinary progress on which the parroco flattered him, Mark's optimism was not above hoping that in a short time he should speak the dialect, if not perfectly, at any rate sufficiently well to carry on quite long conversations with people who did not know any Latin to restore communication. The parroco now returned to the reason of Mark's arrival, and finally, after a hot quarter of an hour of Latin, English, Italian and dialect, he grasped that Mark had arrived here for sunshine.

"Ah si, ho capito!"

What a *cretino* he had been not to understand sooner that Mark wanted to take sun-baths!

"*Et tranquillitatem,*" Mark added. "*Hic locus extra mundum est. Ergo mihi placet. Sed non mihi placet albergo ubi sum nunc. Est alter albergo tranquillior? Cibus simplex mihi placet.*"

The parroco at once agreed that the village inn was noisy, and suggested that Mark might live with some worthy and honest folk on the marina, where incidentally he might care to see the little chapel of Sant' Antonio di Padova. These worthy and honest fisherfolk would be only too happy to give Mark accommodation. They inhabited a very large and very old house right on the beach, *proprio sulla spiaggia*. It was really more a palace than a house. The only trouble was the quantity of fleas that were likely to disturb Mark's desired tranquillity.

"*Piscatores mihi placeunt,*" Mark said. "*Pulices fastidium mihi non dant.*"

In that case, if Mark would wait a few minutes while he spoke to his housekeeper about a few matters of no real importance, but still . . . he expressed with a huge shrug of the shoulders his opinion of household matters. If Mark would wait, he should be delighted to take him down to the marina and introduce him to the fisherfolk.

Half an hour later Mark and the parroco walked down

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through olive groves to the marina of Crapano, a bow-shaped beach of blackish sand, facing full south, with a glorious view of the immense cliffs stretching eastward to Amalfi and Salerno and bounded on the west by a promontory rising fifteen hundred feet and more to the conical peak of Monte Campanella. At the other end of the beach was a row of half a dozen gaily coloured houses and one massive building, all the doors and windows of which had richly moulded stone architraves. It looked like the domestic quarters of a castle and really did deserve to be called a palazzo. Some of the lower rooms were occupied by stalls for cattle, others served as boat-houses, and one was filled with an olive press. The wife of the owner was delighted to offer Mark a room, if he could put up with the poverty of the furniture, the dullness of the view, the simplicity of the food. . . .

"And the fleas," the parroco interrupted with a chuckle.

The goodwife held up her hands in unaffected dismay. "*Nursi! nursi!*" she sighed.

Mark did not know what this meant, but there was evidently going to be a real plague of fleas. However, one flea is as bad as a million, and when he saw the great room indicated for his entertainment, with the high vaulted ceiling and the labyrinthine pattern of the old porcelain tiles on the floor, he would not have gone back to the albergo for anything. The parroco arranged for Mark's bag to be fetched and sent word to say that Don Tommaso himself was coming in later to pay the bill, which, as he pointed out to Mark, would be a great mortification for the innkeeper, who would lose at least five liras by such a proceeding. However, inasmuch as he set out to be a free-thinker and anti-clerical, he thoroughly deserved to lose an even greater sum. And now he must say a *rivederci*, because for to-day and the two following days he should be very much occupied with the vintage, but early on Friday morning he should be happy to take Mark quail-shooting, and later on they might explore some of the caves along the coast and perhaps shoot a few pigeons.

Mark was fascinated by the rounded extremity of

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the Sorrentine peninsula, which was reached after some three miles of rough cliff-walking round the base of Monte Campanella. Once upon this sea-haunted promontory had stood a temple to Minerva, the resort of thousands of pilgrims, as nowadays may be some famous shrine of the Blessed Virgin. Of that great temple nothing remained but a few heaps of stones. Earthquakes and Normans, and frightened peasants seeking for stone to build watch towers against the Saracens, and the ruthless touch of time bringing new creeds and new centres of culture, had reduced it to a sunburnt desolation. No longer did the pharos flame forth the passing of the corn ships from Alexandria that would fill the granaries of mighty Rome for another year and provide bread for its greedy and insolent population. The lizard and the scorpion, the wild bee and the grasshopper, the praying mantis and the spider, a myriad ants, a colony of swifts, a few hawks and gulls, a dolphin or two in the sleepy blue water that lapped the low cliff, these were all that remained of life in a spot where once life had been lived to the full. But the past was not yet obliterated, for as Mark sat dreaming here, gazing across the strait at the high cliffs of Sirene translucent and many-faceted as a cut sapphire in the morning sunlight, and playing idly with the small stones to his hand, he picked up a little terra cotta head of the virgin goddess. Some pilgrim must have bought it to carry back to Capua or Rome or Neapolis as a souvenir of his holiday, and in the confusion of the crowd have dropped it here nearly two thousand years ago. The rains of twenty centuries had pocked that pure and haughty face; the helmet was chipped, and the curve of the horsehair plume had lost its shape; but it was still indisputably the image of Minerva herself. Hardly in the days of her renown could any of her worshippers have accorded her as much reverence as Mark accorded that little head which had survived the persecution of weather and the long contumely of time, when he placed it in his pocket and wandered pensively up the brown slopes of Monte Campanella. That terra cotta head affrighted his own hope of immortality by the serene indifference of its attitude

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toward man that cast it to outlive himself. In truth there still clung to it the attributes of divinity, a faint magic of power that, though instilled into a mere lump of baked earth by a human hand, gave to that lump of earth a more intelligible immortality than he that moulded it to the similitude of a goddess. Until he picked up that terra cotta head Mark had been enjoying himself. He had reflected upon the transience of the works of man; he had grown sentimental over the desolation that now brooded over what was once a great mart and centre of religion; he had, in fact, been congratulating himself upon himself. He had been for a space the owner of this solitude, with nothing except living organisms obviously less permanent than himself to dispute his lordship. But when he had found that head his own importance shrank. He became no more than the lizard and the wild bee, and less, much less, than the breath of the summer day.

While Mark was thus relegating himself to the vast impermanence of all life he heard the jingling of bells and, looking up, perceived on the slope of the mountain above him a large flock of goats being driven across the scanty pasturage by a girl. She was lissom and brown, with dark, upslanting eyes and red lips upcurving at the corners, and altogether as much like a young faun as anything Mark had ever seen. She was not troubling herself about personal immortality, he thought, with a sudden sharp contempt for his own meditations. He could not resist waving to her, and to his pleasure and surprise, instead of running away, she came swinging down the slope to meet him. In one way he was sorry that he could not talk to her; but in another way he was glad, for thus she could not utter a word that would break the spell of her grace, or make her less impersonal than an exquisite bronze in which the sun had kindled an illusion of breathing humanity. Partly because he wished to gloss over the embarrassment of not being able to answer her unknown tongue, and partly because he desired to become through contact with her as characteristic and inherent a portion of this landscape as she herself, Mark took her slim, boyish hand. A blush damson-deep flooded her cheeks. Her eyes flamed

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with swift fire that died away almost instantly to leave a darkness behind more profound than before. She sighed not with any human sorrow or satisfaction, but with such a sigh as the wind in the grass. She turned to look over her shoulder at the goats and murmured something, but for answer Mark drew her down to sit beside him on the parched slope where there was nothing green except the first sprouts of new leaves upon the great spurges. They must have sat for an hour at peace while the ground before them flickered with heat and the sun rained its beams into the sea. The bells and bleatings of the goats did not seem to interrupt the silence. Suddenly Mark leapt to his feet, went over and kissed her hand, and left her, unable not to keep looking back to wave to her along that mountain slope, and afraid all the while that he should presently turn back himself and never leave this promontory, but stay here for ever till he and she, too, were chipped and broken by time. He had a fancy to call upon Minerva to appear in the sky, and offer them the sight of her dreadful Ægis that they might be turned to stones, and on this mountain slope stay in contemplation of the coiling sea until the first heaven and the first earth were passed away, and there was no more sea. Mark decided that he should be prudent if he avoided that promontory for the rest of his holiday. This land was of old the haunt of sirens; and though this siren might be voiceless, there are eyes that sing as well as lips, eyes like morning stars. Luckily Don Tommaso was coming to-morrow, and that would prevent his surrendering to a renewal of the adventure.

When Mark reached his room on the sea-shore, he might have believed that it was all a noontide dream, had not his clothes given out such a perfume of myrtle and rosemary as really did make him dream all through that drowsy afternoon.

Don Tommaso opened the shooting expedition by saying Mass at four o'clock in the little chapel of St. Anthony that was built on a ledge of rock overhanging the sea a few paces from Mark's lodging. He regretted that Mark had not been in time to join in the celebration of his feast in the month of June. The proceeds of all the

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fish caught during the previous week were devoted to fireworks, and this year the display had been prodigious. St. Anthony himself always went out in the prow of a boat to meet and greet the fish devoted to his honour.

"Piscibus orationem fecit?" Mark inquired.

No, he did not preach to the fishes on this occasion. There had been no need to admonish them, Don Tommaso added with a twinkle, because they had entered the net with the greatest docility. But one year they had had to row the saint out to deliver a very strong sermon, for there were not enough fish caught by the thirteenth of June that year to provide him with even a couple of meagre rockets, still less with thirty or forty fat bombs. The celebration of the feast had actually to be postponed until half-way through August, which meant that it was considerably overshadowed by the Assumption of Our Lady of Positano farther down the coast.

"Quid piscibus dixit?" Mark asked.

"Chi sa? Ma non c'è paura. Li avrebbe fatto un'osservazione assai commovente."

Certainly the weight of the catch had nearly broken the net.

Mark said how sorry he was to have missed such a notable exhibition of saintly persuasion, and wished that he could have the pleasure of seeing one of these local feasts before he went away.

"Ma come? C'è una festa," Don Tommaso exclaimed. Next Monday, it being the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mass would be said at sunrise in the little chapel of Santa Maria di Campanella at the very top of the mountain. It was the custom for nearly everybody in Crapano to walk up the evening before and spend the night in dancing tarantellas and watching fireworks and blowing horns on the open mountain. The vintage had been a good one, and no doubt this year the feast would be kept with the utmost enthusiasm.

While breakfast was being eaten in deference to Mark's supposedly voracious northern appetite, Don Tommaso divested himself of his soutane and appeared in the costume that is considered appropriate by Latins to the sport of shooting birds. They had been joined by

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the mayor of Crapano, who had donned in addition to leggings and a green coat of countless pockets a Tyrolese hat. Half a dozen lean hounds were barking, and half a dozen ragged beaters were chattering together on the strand. Mark was lent a gun, with which he blazed away more out of respect to his hosts than from the least desire to kill any of the plump little quails that after feeding on the grain of mid-Europe were travelling South for the winter. In point of fact, he did not succeed in killing one, and he was inclined to think that those killed by the others fell paralysed rather by the ferocity of the costumes than by small shot. They got back to the Marina about ten o'clock, where, after devouring a great dish of spaghetti, they all took a long siesta which lasted till four o'clock, when they embarked in a boat to glide in and out of jewelled caves. In one of these which was patriotically claimed to equal any of the more famous grottos of the island of Sirene, Don Tommaso challenged Mark to a swimming match. At first it seemed a sacrilege to profane these dripping vaults of lapis lazuli and silent amaranthine waters with the splash of human bodies. But when Don Tommaso plunged in with a mighty shout, and was presentiy beheld like a silver comet swimming in night, Mark plunged after him, envious of such a transfiguration and eager himself to churn up such a luminous foam and to behold his own arms beaded with mercury and diamonds. After they had bathed they sailed across to the Sirenelle, three minute islands once the abode of sirens more positively dangerous than any in the neighbourhood, perhaps the very ones that nearly lured Odysseus to his doom. But that was long ago. The islets were now inhabited by nothing more dangerous than a few tired itinerant quails, which Mark begged Don Tommaso and the mayor not to shoot. On the largest of the islets, which may have been a quarter of a mile long and a hundred yards broad at the widest point, they sat down to drink a little vermouth and nibble a biscuit or two. Suddenly Mark realized, by the many fragments of tessellated pavement that strewed the ground, that they were sitting among the ruined foundations of what must have been the villa of a Roman. What manner of man

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was he? Did he bring his wife and his children here every summer? Had pine and cypress cast a grateful shade in those days? Mark was once more in the thralldom of the inexorable past, which like a beetling cliff pressed upon the imagination so heavily that though he was walking on the wide road of the present he was almost driven by that overhanging mass above to fling himself over the precipice of the future on the other side of the road. It was a sort of claustrophobia, a sensation of being imprisoned in time. This sun-coloured isle like that promontory was no longer his; and he was filled with a momentary craving for a land without a history and without a ghost, where the countless multitudes of all the human thoughts that had been did not darken the air of the mind, so that between God and man there was always man. In such a land it would not matter to be forgotten or to be remembered. In such a land God might speak out of the whirlwind, saying, *Canst thou bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades, or loose the bonds of Orion?* Nor would man answer his question with the buzzing of an aeroplane's propeller. It was the infernal cleverness of man that was so discouraging. At the present rate of material progress he would soon be interfering seriously with the order of the universe. And the growth of his self-consciousness since Adam and Eve sewed figleaves together for aprons! But never since that shameful moment had there been such a rapid growth of self-consciousness as during the last hundred years. And yearly it was growing more rapidly and becoming more acute. Don Tommaso was snoring. So was the mayor. So were the boatmen. They were not so extremely self-conscious. And that long-dead Roman who built his villa here? He had not bothered who had been before him, nor who should come after him. He had probably sat here on many such afternoons as this, while his children played at ball in the shady court; and while he was sitting here, perhaps in Galilee Christ was sitting by the Lake of Gennesareth. It might be that this Roman had met Pontius Pilate, and heard him tell the story of the strange fanatic whose personality (he would have shrugged his shoulders in trying to find a reason why) had

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faintly disquieted him. Or was He no more than a strange fanatic, and was God the creation, not the creator of man?

They did not reach Crapano until the moon was shining on the olive-groves above the marina, from which rasping like a hundred sawmills the noise of the cicalas came out across the sea to greet them. The fish they had caught were cooked with plenty of garlic. There were bottles of a very potent red wine. There was not much talk at supper, but a hearty crunching of quail-bones.

"*Dies memorabilis*," Mark said to Don Tommaso, when he bade him good night on the quiet strand.

"*Così si sta bene sempre*," the priest replied. "*Aria fresca! Aria buona, sana!*" And with a cavernous and resounding yawn he strode off up the hill to bed.

How right he was, Mark thought; fresh air, good, healthy air! One did indeed always stand well so. Why torment oneself with the past, the present, or the future?

CHAPTER XXI

MOON

THE little chapel of Santa Maria di Campanella stood on the summit of the mountain with a view over the bay of Naples and the bay of Salerno. The flat domes of the roof, a symphony of grey and green and golden lichen, gave it an Oriental appearance like so much of the architecture in this part of Italy. It is supposed to indicate the influence of the Saracens, but it is probably due to nothing more than a desire to catch all the water possible in this land where water is scarce. A hermitage was attached to the chapel; but the hermit had died a year or so back, and no fresh hermit had taken his place. Mass was only sung here on the morning of the eighth of September, for, as Don Tommaso said, it was a long pull for poor priests on an empty stomach. Recognized as a feast of thanksgiving for the vintage, it was scarcely fanciful to suppose that it was the direct successor of the Roman Bacchanalia. Mark remembered the Mass that Dorward had said in the hop-garden at Galton on the same date seven years ago. They had not watched all the night through, but they had kept it up till late with their concert; and there had been a true glamour of the South about that green English festival.

The top of Monte Campanella was thronged from ten o'clock. There were booths for the sale of fruit and coffee and sweets; but a large cave in the side of the mountain illuminated with naphtha torches, paraffin lamps and candles was the chief resort. It was here that the tarantella was danced, and here that the wine flowed freely. The din was tremendous, because nearly everybody spent his time in blowing a tin horn into his neighbour's ear, except when the band struck up a tarantella, when everybody stopped blowing a horn and clapped his

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hands instead. The sense of exuberant humanity filled Mark with joy. The heat and noise and dust, the mingled fumes of spilt wine and paraffin, the fantastic shadows on the vaulted roof of the cavern, the flaring of the jets, the smell of goats and dry fodder, the wooden music of the queer home-made instruments, and the jingling of a barrel organ, combined to create what was more like a jolly inferno than anything else.

Outside the cavern the moonlight poured across the Salernian bay, in the central stream of which the Sirenelle islets lay like black whales asleep. One after another along the coast the lamps of small towns and villages glittered; twenty miles away on the northern side the trams in Naples showed like lighted fuses spitting gold all along the front; and far out to southward a fleet of fishing boats, each with an acetylene lamp in the stern to attract their quarry, hunted a small squid that was the delicacy of the season.

While Mark was submitting to the enchantment of the moonlight he felt his sleeve plucked, and, looking round, saw the girl with whom at noon he had sat hand in hand upon the brown slopes of this same mountain. She was smiling, and perhaps because the night made her bold she gazed directly at him with lustrous eyes that caught the moonshine like pools of water. None of the black velvet shadows that wandered about the mountain side was near them. Mark put his arm under hers and twined his fingers round her wrist. The noise of the blown horns, of the barrel organ and of clapping hands grew fainter. They were walking farther and farther away from the merrymakers, and when presently they came to the head of a gorge on the northerly slope there was hardly a sound audible except the trilling of the mole-crickets. The underwood grew much higher in the gorge. There was even a tree here and there, an ilex or wild locust spangled by the moon. The perfume of the aromatic shrubs gave back the stored-up warmth of the day. Suddenly from the deeper shadows below where the moonlight did not reach an owl hooted. The girl clung to Mark in terror, for the sound is of ill-omen, and the bird itself is credited with much power of hurting poor

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mortals. Mark held the girl in his arms, and when he lowered his head to console her their lips met. Her kiss was sharp and sweet as the scent of rosemary; her slim body quivered in his embrace like a sapling grasped to stay the headlong descent of a wooded mountain path.

And if his creed was an illusion?

He held her more closely strained to him. Her cheeks were warm and velvety as peaches in the sun.

Here at least was the assurance of immortality if by this girl he could have a child. Each year he should see it grow, as it were from the very soil of this land.

The girl wanted to give herself to him. Was he to make of this natural attraction a morbid and monkish temptation? How close she was clinging to him! How close . . . how close . . . he should be mad to refuse this knowledge without which he should be for ever discontented.

And if all that he ever believed was a dream?

Why should he sacrifice to-night for a dream? He had a right to love. He had in such a place at such a time with such a maid a duty to love.

At this moment the first bomb burst above them in a shower of red stars, lighting the gorge to the likeness of a chasm in hell.

"*Venite, venite!*" Mark cried.

And he pulled her back up the mountain to watch the fireworks.

She did not leave his side all that night, and they sat waiting for the dawn on the crowded peak of the mountain. She did not seem resentful at the way he had treated her. She sat there in seeming content, her hand clasped in his; and for an hour before dawn she slept with her head upon his shoulder. The green dawn came; and with the green dawn came Don Tommaso panting up the mountain followed by a black trail of pious but unadventurous souls who had preferred to sleep in their beds to spending the night under the moon.

Mass in the little chapel was packed. Yet, in spite of having to stand upright all the time in the crush, Mark was able to concentrate upon the miracle of God upon the altar as devoutly as ever in his life. At the Elevation,

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instead of the sacring-bell's jingling its summons to adore the Host, a dozen grenades were exploded immediately outside the open west door to the great comfort and devotion of the faithful. It was what foolish and sanctimonious Northerners call a thoroughly pagan service, and just because it was so essentially the genius of the place it healed Mark's discontent. The image of Minerva, the fragments of tessellated pavement where that long dead Roman sat, the slim roe-eyed girl still beside him, the very sirens of this haunted peninsula were all incorporate within this sun-dyed Mass upon the mountain-top. And did not she whose birthday they were celebrating say to her Son, *They have no wine?* Was not this the best day of all to thank God for the vintage?

Mark decided to let that feast be the culmination of his stay in Crapano. There might not be a red-starred bomb the next time that it was wanted. Besides, he ought not to miss the opportunity of getting to know a little more about Rome.

A fortnight later he returned to England in a mood of serene hope and set out forthwith to Nancepean.

CHAPTER XXII

STARS

MARK was seized with a sudden shyness at the prospect of appearing before the people of Nancepean as their Vicar. He began to feel too much like a prophet in his own country. It was a pity that there was no way of avoiding the formal induction; but he felt that he should bear up under it more happily if he could slip into the place beforehand, so that the pompous ceremony might appear just the joke that it really was. With this idea in his mind he travelled down to Rosemarket without giving any notice of his arrival, and, leaving his luggage in the cloak-room of the station and cramming a few things into a knapsack, he set out to walk the five miles to Nancepean. He did not even take the great main road to Rose Head as far as where the narrow by-road turned off sharp to the right down to Nancepean; but he picked out the most devious route behind Rose Pool, where, in the shadow and silence of deep lanes overhung by wild cherries, he wandered by paths greatly beloved in youth; and about seven o'clock of a golden September evening he reached the outskirts of the village.

Nancepean had not changed much outwardly in twenty years. There was a new and hideous building on the left just beyond the parish hall. The parish hall was not beautiful, but that sanctimonious ark was really horrible with its dressed and pointed granite blocks and its arched windows all out of proportion to the rest of the design. It must be a new conventicle, and a much more pretentious affair than the room in old Hockin's cottage which had served the Wesleyans in the time of his grandfather. This was likely to be a serious rival to a church nearly two miles away up one steep hill and down another. Such a temple would probably have a minister all to itself and not be dependent upon tea-swilling carpet-baggers. And beyond

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the chapel two wedding-cake villas had been built with long front gardens, each of which resembled a dog's cemetery and had one of those ash heaps that people call rockeries. What a crime to have hidden the old apple orchard with such a pair! No, the orchard had vanished altogether. No more Sops-in-wine and Tom Putts and . . . but the rest of the old names of the apples eluded his memory. However, that was almost the whole tale of external change. And the people? Why, surely that was old Miss Lassiter stumping along with the help of the same crooked stick to fetch her water from the pump. The old witch had not altered by a wrinkle in twenty years. Did she still brood over her brass candlesticks and gaily painted bellows, for which so many visitors were reputed to have offered her such vast sums if she would only sell them? Or was she still the crafty old maid who knew better than to sell them for only a fraction of what they were really worth? And did she still delight in making and unmaking those wills that had been the subject of so much village gossip twenty years ago? And were her relatives still waiting anxiously to know which would have the best candlestick and which the second best and which the hoard of gold? Or had she outlived them all?

But old Miss Lassiter was the only one that Mark recognized among the two or three people he saw in the roadway, and he decided to postpone any further exploration of the village that night and go straight to the Hanover Inn to secure his night's lodging. Mark walked along the quarter of a mile that brought him to the Hanover Inn, looking the same as it had always looked, a square whitewashed house with the signpost of a bagwigged George swaying gently in the evening breeze. He read the name of the licensee above the door. *William John Evans, licensed to sell beer, spirits and tobacco.* Evans? The name was unfamiliar in Nancepean. Then old man Timbury must be dead, and there would be another sexton. Perhaps it was as well, Mark thought, remembering with a smile his first encounter with that veteran of the Crimea.

William John Evans was a rubicund, genial fellow in the prime of life, very proud of being the landlord of the

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Hanover Inn, and not less proud of being a Roseford man, which he had no doubt whatever was as much finer a place to be born in than Nancepean as Nancepean was finer than anywhere else. He had only held a licence here for three years, and there had been two other landlords between him and Timbury. As soon as Mark revealed who he was, he expressed the greatest satisfaction, for not only had he the keys of the church and those of the vicarage hanging at this very moment on the wall of their parlour, but his arrival was going to give very particular pleasure to Mrs. Evans, who only this morning at dinner had been wondering why they had heard nothing further about the new vicar, and hoping very much that he was going to be in time to hold the Harvest Home and thereby put some of their noses out of joint down to the chapel.

"Ess, ess, you've come to the very place as you ought to have come first, I believe," Mr. Evans declared. "And my missus is going to be brim pleased about it. I do know that. That's a sure thing, that is. The only thing as is likely to get her a bit hurried is cooking you a good dinner to-night. 'Tis too late to kill a chicken now, and that's going to hurry her a lot, that is. Only last week she said, 'William John,' she said to me, 'don't you go wringing that cockerel's neck, or I'll wring yours. That's for the first time the new vicar do come here along to supper with us.' 'I don't want to wring his neck, darn'ee,' I said. 'No, and you'd better look you don't, William John.'"

"Is Mrs. Evans in now?"

"Oh, she's in right enough, but 'twould be better if I was to let her know you're here. She've been washing up the clomb, and I don't believe as she'd be best pleased if I was to take 'ee out to her without giving her a minute to make herself fitty. What with so many visitors and all, she've had a good deal to do this summer. So, if you'd come and sit awhile in the parlour, she'll come in to shake hands. Will you take something to drink?"

"I'll have a Guinness," Mark said.

"You're not a teetotaller, then?" Mr. Evans asked, his blue eyes twinkling rapidly.

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Mark shook his head.

"Well, mostly church folk don't belong to be teetotallers. But, darn'ee, things is so twisted right around nowadays that none can say what any man's liquor is. Mostly when I were a boy the teetotallers belonged to be the miserablest, leariest, ordinaryest set of chaps you ever set eyes on, but darn'ee, nowadays I've seen 'em so healthy-looking and upstanding as any in the land."

"I see they've destroyed the old apple orchard on the right as you come down through Nancepean. Was that for the cider?"

"That's it," the landlord said bitterly. "That were old Sam Dale put 'un up to that game. They all come hollering down with axes and I don't know what an' all, hollering and belling 'Hallelujah! Hallelujah!' and started in to scat up the trees. Old Sam Dale he shouted he could see the devil so large as life sneaking out of the orchard wi' his tail between his legs, and wi' that they screamed and screeched 'Glory be to God on high,' and scat up the rest of the trees. I weren't there myself. It happened before ever I come to Nancepean. Nigh twenty year ago, soon after Parson Trehawke was drowned."

"My grandfather," said Mark.

"Was Parson Trehawke your grandfa'? Then you're half a Cornishman?"

Mark nodded.

"Darn'ee, that good, that is. You get an Englishman down here along and the poor chap don't know where he be."

"Is Sam Dale still alive?"

"Oh, ess. They'll never have him to Heaven or to Hell. He's a blooming old nuisance, and his son's worse nor what he is."

"Is that Cass?"

"Ess, the Reverend Casimir Dale, though we belong to call him the Reverend Kiss my — Dale."

"We used to be great friends as boys," said Mark. "And so Cass became a minister after all, did he?"

"He did worse nor that. He got made minister here, and his father give half to build that blaring chapel."

Stars

But, if you'll excuse me, Mr. Lidderdale, I'll go and tell the missus you're here, so as she can be seeing about your supper."

"I can have my supper with you, can't I?" Mark suggested.

"Why, sure enough if you've a mind to," said the landlord, beaming.

"Of course I've a mind to," Mark assured him.

After Mark had been sitting for a short while alone in the parlour, a boy of about eleven, with fair curly hair and pale, delicate face in which burned a pair of large very deep blue eyes, put his head round the corner of the door.

"Hullo, who are you? Come in," Mark invited.

"Donald Evans," the boy said shyly.

"Are you Mr. Evans's boy?" Mark asked.

"And Mrs. Evans'," Donald replied.

Mark laughed.

"Come in and talk to me. I'm afraid my arrival like this is going to fuss your mother."

"No, it won't," Donald said. "She's pretty glad you've come."

"That's very sweet of her."

Donald seemed impressed by this praise of his mother and came boldly into the room, when Mark saw that he was lame. He was on the point of asking the boy if he had hurt himself, when he realized that the lameness was habitual and stopped the question in time.

"Can you play checkers?" Donald asked.

"Checkers?" Mark repeated in perplexity. And then from the past the memory of the word returned in a flash. "I'd forgotten for a moment that you called draughts checkers. Yes, I can play checkers."

"I'd like for 'ee to have a game with me," Donald suggested.

"Get out the board, and I'm your man," Mark said.

Donald played with such intensity that the struggle between black and white almost acquired the significance of a racial struggle, and sometimes even more of a struggle between the powers of darkness and the powers of light. They played three games, all of which Mark

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lost whether he manipulated the forces of Apollyon or the celestial units of the Archangel Michael.

"I expect you don't belong to play all the time the same as I do," Donald said courteously.

"I am a bit out of practice," Mark admitted.

"'Tis easy to get out of practice. But I reckon I wouldn't beat 'ee so quick when you've played a few games. Can you play chess?"

Mark nodded, and the boy's eyes sparkled.

"My gosh, I'd like for 'ee to learn me chess. That's some handsome game, I reckon."

"I'll teach you the moves now if you've got any chessmen."

Donald sighed.

"Ah, but I haven't got any. Old Miss Lassiter's got some, but I don't believe she'd lend 'em to me, even if I was to go down along and ask her. They do say she's a witch," he added, keenly regarding Mark to note the effect on him of such a reputation.

"We used to say she was a witch when I was your age," Mark said.

"Do 'ee know her, then?"

"I knew her twenty years ago and more."

Mark explained to Donald how that happened, and related a few adventures of his youth, which made the boy's eyes sparkle again.

"Well, I reckon 'tis grand that you've come back here along. When my Ba said the new parson was in the parlour, I never thought you'd lived here when you was a boy. My gosh, I'll have something to tell 'em to the school to-morrow. Mostly they reckoned you'd have a white beard," he added.

"Why should I have a white beard? Did Parson Morse have a white beard?"

"No, he had a moustache," Donald said. "That's why they reckoned you'd have a beard."

Mark found the logic of this deduction hard to follow, but he supposed that it was probably a vague application of the Mendelian law.

"What was Parson Morse like?" he asked.

"I didn't care much for him. Some do say he was

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loony. We boys and maids didn't like him, because he was always measuring our noses."

"Measuring your noses?" Mark exclaimed. "What on earth for?"

"To see if we was Jews. He said he reckoned that all the Cornish folk belonged to be Jews. I don't rightly know how he come to think that, but he had it all worked out in his head. The lost tribes of Israel. That's what he always belonged to preach about down church. My Ba said if you went church Parson told 'ee you was a lost tribe, and if you went chapel Minister told 'ee you was a lost sheep. My Ba said he'd a mind to go nowhere at all, only Mother got mad wi 'un when he spoke so, and told him he ought to be ashamed of himself to talk so heathen. But he warn't, because I saw him laughing when she turned her back."

"What kind of services did Mr. Morse have?"

"He didn't have no services at all. Not more than he could help. He was all the time grubbing away with his books—gurt heavy books! I never saw such books in all my life. And dusty! My gosh, they was thick with dust. And so was he. I've seen the piskies flying out of his pockets."

"The piskies? Oh, yes, I remember, moths."

"We belong to call 'em piskies," Donald said firmly, all his Cornish soul in revolt against an implied criticism of even a Cornish expression.

At this moment Mrs. Evans came in to shake hands with Mark. She was a thin dark-eyed woman with a clear-cut profile, obviously tormented by shyness, but as obviously determined to conquer it for the sake of her son, for whom her passionate motherhood had immediately discerned in Mark a friend.

"If you'd but told us you were coming . . ." she murmured.

"But that would have made *me* feel uncomfortable," Mark said. "It's just because you've welcomed me so kindly without being prepared for me that I shall enjoy and appreciate your hospitality."

"I could easily have laid your supper for 'ee in here."

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"Now please," Mark begged. "Either treat me as a friend of the family, or pitch me out into the road."

"Why, there's a way to talk," Mrs. Evans said. But she was pleased nevertheless, and led the way to supper, working off on her husband her own embarrassment.

"Oh, my dear life, William John, whatever are 'ee standing about doing nothing for? Why don't the man uncork a bottle of something instead of standing there looking so arkwurd."

"I didn't know which bottle to draw," her husband protested. "I didn't know if Mr. Lidderdale would be drinking Bass or Guinness."

"Ask him, then, ask him! Dear life alive, was ever such a man seen or heard of in all the days of the world?"

"I'll have Guinness," said Mark quickly.

Conversation at supper was mostly about the people in the village, and by the end of the meal Mark had filled in the history of twenty years a great deal more easily than he might have expected. There was in the racy Cornish narrative a vividness that impressed his memory, so that he did not feel that he was likely to forget the various marriages of people whom he had known as children, or the deaths of those whom he had known in their old and middle age.

"I'm sorry I never saw my grandfather's successor," he said. "But Mr. Morse had not arrived before my mother and I left Nancepean."

"Ah, he was a fine old boy was Parson Morse," Evans exclaimed, with enthusiasm. "A grand old chap, he was, I reckon. One of the old school, I believe. There won't be many of 'em left soon."

"And a good job too," Mrs. Evans declared. "And whatever do you want to sit there for, William John, glorifying a dead man who, you do know very well, you couldn't abide when he was alive? 'Tis no more than the love of hearing your own tongue wag, I do believe. Why, many's the time I've heard 'ee say that Parson Morse was a homely, hungry, pernickety little old nuisance, and that you didn't wonder chapel was full and church empty. But now just because the man's dead and buried he's turned

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into a fine old boy. I've no patience with 'ee, you foolish, loud-speaking man ! "

"Oh well, he wasn't too bad," said William John.

Mark came to his rescue by asking if they would be able to put him up at the Hanover Inn until the Vicarage was ready. William John looked across at his wife as if he would challenge her with his position as landlord.

"Why, of course we can put 'ee up and welcome," he said.

But Mrs. Evans was not going to let the gauntlet lie.

"I'd dearly love to know what you do know about it," she said. Then, turning to Mark, she added : "But for sure we can put 'ee up. Don't think otherwise. 'Tis only that William John do always speak so quick, and do never think whatever he be saying."

William John winked at his son behind his wife's back, whereat Donald burst out laughing.

"Donald," his mother exclaimed, "if you can't behave yourself I shall send 'ee straight off up to bed. You do know very well that I can't abear for 'ee to laugh so coarse whenever your father do talk silly. Now, mind, that's the last warning I give 'ee, or off up to bed you go ! "

Mark thought that it would be wise to create a diversion ; so he asked if Mrs. Evans would mind his taking the keys of the church, and going out to pay a visit now.

"Oh, can I go too, Mum?" Donald asked eagerly.

"Mr. Lidderdale will never want you chattering all the way to Church Cove."

"On the contrary," Mark said, "if you don't mind his being out so late, Mrs. Evans, I should like his company more than I can say."

"Well, I don't rightly know if he ought to go," Mrs. Evans said, evidently much gratified by Mark's wish to have him. "His knee's been so bad lately. . . ."

"Oh, no, it hasn't. It's much better," Donald declared.

"Now, Donald, if you dare hop on that chair again you'll hop up to bed," she snapped.

"He don't want to go out at this time of night. Why, 'tis gone ten," said his father.

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"Now, William John, you do know very well that if I leave Donald go 'tis my business and none of yours. Very well, Donald, you can go."

Donald gave a whoop, and William John without further protest went and fetched the keys, which he handed to Mark.

"'Tis a fine clear night of stars," he said. "What breeze there was is gone, and the sea is so smooth as glass."

"You'll want some candles," said Mrs. Evans, "for there's none down church, I'll be bound."

Mark and Donald walked in silence as far as the brow of Pendhu Cliff, where they turned aside before making the steep descent to Church Cove, and sat for awhile on the heathery turf three hundred and fifty feet above the sea.

"Jupiter is setting fast," Mark said, pointing to the planet which was now hanging over the western horizon and casting the thin gleam of its reflection across St. Levan's Bay.

"Jupiter?" Donald repeated. "That hasn't got nothing to do with Cornishmen being Jews, has it?" he asked suspiciously.

"No, no, no," Mark laughed; and he explained about the planets to Donald.

"And what's that 'un over there?" the boy asked, pointing to a great star in the north-west winking with orange and silver flames.

"I think that must be Arcturus," Mark told him. And then murmured to himself, *Canst thou bring forth Mazaroth in his season? or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons?*

"Who are his sons, anyway?" Donald asked.

"I think that Job's Arcturus is probably the Great Bear. There he lies right over Nancepean."

"We don't belong to call they stars the Great Bear. We belong to call them the Dipper," Donald said. "Because that's what they do look like." Then he added abruptly, "We belong to pick blue men's caps where we're sitting now, come May month."

"I remember them well," Mark said, and back from

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his boyhood came the joy of beholding those columbines which here put on a deep true blue unlike the dark purple ones that grew inland in the coppices. "And about this time of year," he went on, "we used to find ladies' tresses."

"I never heard tell of they," Donald said.

"I'll show them to you some day," Mark promised. "They grow on the Castle, too, behind the church."

"You do know the name we belong to call that cliff behind the church? I reckon that perhaps you really did live here when you was a boy like me."

"Didn't you believe me, then?" Mark asked with a smile.

"Well, I didn't so much not believe 'ee, but I thought perhaps you were just telling me for fun."

"No, no, I truly did live here."

"Did 'ee ever see a merrymaid?"

"No," said Mark. "I spent many an hour looking out for one, but I never had any luck."

"That's like me. I were hours and hours and hours when my knee was worse than what it is now sitting on the little low cliffs just before you come to Church Cove. But I never see a merrymaid, and that must be some handsome sight to see, I suppose. Mostly they belong to be combing their hair when they're seen, and once I took mother's comb and left it lying on a rock quite handy for any merrymaid; but none never come and found it, and the sea washed it away, and mother was so mad when she couldn't find her comb that my Ba drove into Rosemarket and bought her a new one, because she said he must have trod on it and scat it up and never dared let on to her what he done."

"Well, we may see a mermaid yet," Mark said. "And now let's get down along, or your mother will be thinking that I've lost you the same as you lost her comb."

"No, she wouldn't think that," Donald said very seriously.

The ferny scent of the deep road from Pendhu to Church Cove nearly overwhelmed Mark by its obliteration of the years that lay between the last time he went down this road and the present.

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"Do 'ee knaw for why I wanted to come down with 'ee to-night?" Donald asked. "I wanted to come so as to see if the ghosts do really walk by night in the churchyard. But I wouldn't like for to come down by myself, no, nor yet walk back along to Nancepean by myself."

It had been a warm and humid night at the shutting in of November when Mark had passed this way last, and then the moon, thickly clouded over, had scarcely given more light than was shed now by the clear starshine of September. And had not Cass Dale, the friend of his boyhood, refused to accompany him farther on the road, because he had been afraid to walk back along to Nancepean by himself?

"Well, Donald, if we do see a ghost I shall run for my life," Mark told him, laughing.

"My gosh, and so shall I," Donald agreed fervidly.

They were nearing the end of the deep lane, and the sharp sweet bitterness of the sea was mingling with the ferny scents of earth. The sands of Church Cove glimmered before them in the starlight, and presently the feathery tamarisks brushed against their cheeks as they crossed the churchyard to enter the church.

While Donald wandered round with a lighted candle, throwing giant shadows of himself upon the roof and on the walls and on the floor of the ancient building, Mark knelt to beseech a blessing upon his work here:

"It was here, O God, that I first knew Thy Love and as a child first saw Thy wondrous works, when Thou didst teach the samphire how near it might grow to the sea and yet not be swept away, and when thou didst say to the glowworm that upon the leaves of the samphire it might shine forth unafraid of the tide's advance, for Thou didst speak to the sea saying, *Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.* I have doubted Thy great goodness, O Lord God, and I am not worthy to kneel before Thee. I have questioned Thy commandments, O Lord, and exalted mine own folly above Thy marvellous wisdom. Grant me now to behold in this little child that lights up Thy dwelling-place even as once the glowworm lit up the green leaves of the samphire the

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assurance of Thy love. Reveal to him Thy protection, and grant me to see in him all that I ought to have seen in myself. If it be not Thy will that I should bring all people here to Thee, grant at least Thy saving grace to him even as once Thou didst grant it to me. I know that I have received it unworthily, but grant me to behold in him one who receives it worthily. If I have only put forth leaves, let him put forth fruit, and do not Thou, O Lord, wither me utterly away for my barrenness.

"Almighty and most merciful Saviour, teach Thy people of Nancepean to know surely that Thou dost in very truth abide with them always upon Thy Altar. Lead them to seek Thee in That Most Holy Sacrament of Thy Precious Body and Blood. Grant to me Thy humble priest such eloquence, such zeal, such desire for Thy service that I may unlock for them the Treasury of Thyself, but most of all grant to them the will to hearken to my words, and this I beg not for myself but for them, not out of vainglory or self-love, but humbly, because Thou didst suffer all that men might live. And now Thou art no more in the world, but we are in the world. Therefore, O most merciful Saviour, help our unbelief. And if sometimes to our faithless hearts Thou dost seem eternally silent and infinitely absent, so that we wander far astray like lost sheep, be merciful to our humanity and show us the light of Thy Countenance and speak to our hearts.

"And thou, compassionate Mother of God, by thy Seven Sorrows I implore thee to intercede with thy Divine Son that He may pour forth upon us His grace."

Mark rose from his knees, and lighting another candle he explored the sacristy with Donald. There seemed to be nothing except a few empty cupboards. There were not even any sacred vessels.

"When Mr. Morse celebrated Holy Communion what vessels did he use?" Mark asked.

Donald looked puzzled.

"Didn't he have a chalice? That's a big silver cup."

"He had a silver cup on his sideboard, and he used to bring that down church sometimes."

"Aren't there any surplices even?" Mark asked.

"Are you going to have surplices?" Donald inquired

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eagerly. "My gosh, that'll be grand. Parson Morse never had no surplises. But I'd be so happy as a piece of gold if I could wear a surplice."

It was evident that Father Mortemer's offer to equip the church was going to involve him in a good deal of expense. However, perhaps it was as well really that there was absolutely nothing. It would be easier to change from nothing to everything than from something to everything. When Mark accepted the living of Nancepean there had been several discussions in the clergy-house of St. Cyprian's about the right way of beginning one's career as a beneficed priest. The general opinion had been that whatever changes were going to be made in the services of the church should all be made at once. The system of tactfully leading one's parishioners from candles to vestments, from vestments to incense, from incense to invocation of the saints, from invocation of the saints to a particular devotion for the Blessed Virgin, from a particular devotion for the Blessed Virgin to a tremendous celebration of the Assumption, from a tremendous celebration of the Assumption to an equally tremendous celebration of Corpus Christi, from an equally tremendous celebration of Corpus Christi to Benediction every Sunday afternoon, from Benediction every Sunday afternoon to the Forty Hours' Exposition, from the Forty Hours' Exposition to saying most of the Mass in Latin sounded plausible enough. Unfortunately the usual result of such a gradual education was that after ten years one was still trying to persuade one's congregation to accept a red or a green chasuble as at church bazaars devout and charitable stall-holders try to persuade wealthy parishioners to accept a red or a green cushion-cover.

Mark with memories of poor Shuter at St. Luke's, Galton, had heartily agreed with this theory of all at once. There would, of course, be the usual outraged secessions from church to chapel, the usual outcry that the simple piety of generations was being affronted by the mumbo-jumbo of the new vicar, and the usual indignant letters to the Bishop. But it was always difficult to move a bishop to take direct action until he had exhausted all the patience of his fatherliness in God; and there was every reason to

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hope that, when the parishioners had been calmed down by the personality of their new Vicar, the letters of protest would become less frequent and the Bishop would believe that the storm had blown over.

Yet now that Mark was faced by the utter unpreparedness of his church, he began to feel dismayed at the magnitude of the task he was setting himself in trying to change the whole point of view of Nancepean about the way to worship Almighty God. He detected in his attitude that first-night anxiety which he had always so much deplored when he had come across it in other churches. He was not prone to self-deception, and he could not help asking himself how much of his energy was going to be occupied in converting people to accept forms and ceremonies instead of converting them to accept the faith of which those forms and ceremonies were the outward visible expression, or not so much an expression as an accompaniment slowly developed through centuries. No Roman Catholic missionary would bother himself about demonstrating to the heathen the efficacy of the chasuble. The really important thing was to convert Nancepean to believe that Jesus Christ was on their altar, and through their belief in that astonishing fact to bring them nearer to the Person of Jesus Christ than they now were to that nebulous bearded figure in a polychromatic nightgown, to not one of Whose behests they were paying the least attention, so remote must He be both pictorially and actually from their everyday life, so remote must He be even on Sundays, when they worshipped the Sabbath but not Him Who abolished the Sabbath. If they could only grasp that He was in their midst, not peering round corners like an incorporeal policeman, not spookily, with the eye of a super-detective, but in all the glory of His Godhead and in all the beauty of His Humanity, perhaps they would offend against Him less with their tongues, less with their ears, less with their hands than they offended against Him hourly now. Might it not be more effective to spend the whole of his eloquence in convincing the people of Nancepean that Jesus Christ was as truly present upon their altar in this little church by the sea as He was present when He was

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nailed to that Cross on Calvary, than to run the risk of driving them farther away than ever (if that were possible) from the Person of Jesus Christ in order to gratify his own conception of an historic church? But here already was a temptation of pusillanimity. When the outward splendours of worship were destroyed at the Reformation, they were destroyed because they were the signs of an inward splendour. They were not destroyed for their own sakes, but because, so long as they were allowed to remain, the doctrines of which they were the symbols could not have been overthrown. And if those outward splendours were to be restored, they would not be restored for their own sakes, but because the doctrines of which they were only the colours and uniform and arms were demanded by the spiritual hunger of a starved nation. Yes, it was a subtle temptation of pusillanimity, it was a counsel of expediency, and expediency was not Divine. Half the criticism one heard nowadays of the Divine purpose was based on its apparent inexpediency.

Mark knelt down once more to pray for Divine help against the prince of this world.

"Of Thy great mercy, O Lord, suffer me not to yield to the promptings of cowardice. Strengthen the feebleness of my resolution not to surrender to the specious insinuations of expediency, for Thy Dear Son's sake Who never thought of expediency when He hung upon the Cross of our salvation."

When Mark returned to the sacristy he found Donald seated in a battered old Glastonbury chair fast asleep.

"Come along, come along," he said. "I don't know what I'm thinking of to keep you up so long. What will your mother say when we get back?"

Donald yawned.

"I was dreaming of merrymaids," he replied. "Only they wasn't combing their hair."

"What were they doing, then?"

"Playing golf."

Mark laughed heartily.

"Well, that's one thing they won't be able to do here."

"How not?" said Donald.

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"There aren't any links, are there?"

"There's links all up Chypie towans. I'll show 'ee the thirteenth hole. 'Tis just here by the churchyard gate."

Mark could see the horrid little red flag, as black as the Jolly Roger by starlight, sticking out of its hole. Then all that glorious sweep of billowy turf would be mangy with hazards and scarred with bunkers and blotched with greens. Ugh!

"Don't 'ee care for golf?" Donald asked.

"No, I hate it," Mark said. "I love cricket, and golf has ruined cricket. Oh, Donald, don't let your beautiful mermaids play golf."

When Mark and Donald got back to the inn, Mrs. Evans bundled her son off to bed, and William John informed Mark in a voice hoarse with mystery that an old friend had heard he was come and wanted to wish him well.

"'Tis Cass Dale," he whispered. "I would surely laugh if it got around to-morrow that he'd sneaked up to the Hanover for a quiet whisky. I wouldn't say it mightn't, for they'll say brim nigh anything to Nancepean."

Mark was interested to meet again the friend of his boyhood. He was not so yellow-haired as twenty years ago; but he was still fair, and his large fair moustache accentuated his fairness. There was not much sympathy between him and Mark when they shook hands again for the first time after such a long interval. Cass measured Mark with his fierce blue eyes as if he scented a mortal combat between them one day. The Reverend J. J. Morse had been no match for the Reverend Casimir Dale, who had come to look upon himself as the leader of Nancepean, even in matters that appertained more strictly to the Church. He was president of the fishing company, and, with his father being one of the biggest of the small farmers in the district, he had an exceptional influence on the agricultural community. Something in Mark's personality roused in him a suspicion that in the near future he was not going to have matters quite so much his own way. However, he concealed his mistrust

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as well as he could, made Mark boisterously welcome to Nancepean, and patronized him for the difficulty he was likely to find in mustering any kind of congregation at that old-fashioned place of worship, St. Tugdual's Church.

"It's too far away, you see, Mr. Lidderdale. Well, I don't know why two old friends should be giving each other 'Mr.,' 'specially two brethren of the cloth, eh? Have you any objection to dropping it as between ourselves?"

"Why, of course not, Cass," Mark replied.

"Well, I didn't mean to get right back to Christian names," the minister said, evidently taken considerably aback by such easy familiarity. "In fact, if you don't mind, I'd rather you didn't call me Cass. You see, I've had to be a bit stand-offish with some of my flock, having been brought up here as a boy."

"I should have thought Christian names were just the thing for two Christians to use," Mark said. "But if you're ashamed of yours, why, we'll forget it."

The minister looked hard at the priest, a flash of annoyance reddening his cheeks. His old friend was going to be quicker with his tongue than most of them; he should have to be careful.

"Well, as I was saying, Lidderdale, they built the church in the wrong place. It's not natural to expect the people to go toiling up to the top of Pendhu and then down that long lane to Church Cove twice every Sunday. They'd have had the best part of an eight mile walk before they went to bed. Yes, I'm afraid you'll find it a bit of a job getting together any kind of a congregation except at Harvest Home or for a wedding or a burial. Though, of course, you'll always get the golfers in the holidays."

"Those beastly links, you mean," Mark said.

"Oh, I shouldn't run them down," the minister responded. "You'll find that they'll pretty well fill your church for you in the month of August."

"Well, I would willingly have foregone the August congregation," said Mark, "if I could see the Chypie towans without those vile red flags."

"You're not a golfer, then?"

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Mark shook his head.

"I used to play cup and ball when I was in the nursery; but I gave that up."

"It's good exercise, I believe," said Cass Dale.

"I expect that's what old Father Ape said when he started ball games by flinging a coconut at his friend."

"Well, the only thing I've got against golf," said Cass Dale, "is that, from what I can see of it, it's a rich man's game. However, as I was going to say when we got on to golf, I hope that you and I will pull together for the Lord, Lidderdale. You won't find me a bitter adversary, especially as we're such old friends. I'd go as far as to offer you my pulpit occasionally, and perhaps you'd care to offer me yours. We hear a lot about there being no love lost between the churches, and perhaps that's true. But I'm not narrow-minded, and I don't forget that we're both fellow workers in the same vineyard."

Mark thanked him for his offer, but he did not say anything about accepting it.

"Well, I mustn't keep you up on your first night. I heard you'd come and I thought I'd look in and wish you well."

"It was very kind of you," Mark said. "I appreciate it very much."

"You'll come and see us? I live in one of those tasty little villas you may have noticed as being new."

"Yes, I noticed them," Mark replied gloomily.

"Well, come in and have a cup of tea any time. My wife will like to meet you."

"You're married?"

"Yes," Cass said. "Married, and got a boy of three. A young Tartar."

"You were a bit of a Tartar yourself," Mark reminded him.

Cass laughed merrily.

"Yes, and I am still," he boasted, "if they rub me up the wrong way. But I can't complain. We're going ahead at our chapel. Yes, the Lord has blessed my labours."

They shook hands and Cass hurried away.

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"There goes a blaring, flaring, thumping Radical," John William said, gazing after the active figure until it was lost to sight. "Some do say he reckons to get into Parliament one day. I don't know what the country's coming to."

"William John!" Mrs. Evans cried from within. "I'm sure I don't know for why you keep Mr. Lidderdale standing out there in the cold. He'll be catching his death listening to you maundering on. Lev him come in and make himself comfortable, my dear man, for the love of goodness!"

Mark went up to bed very soon after this; but sleep kept far away from him. There is a strange hostility in Cornwall, which often affects the least imaginative stranger and eludes any attempt to explain or to define it, or even to describe it. Perhaps it is that Cornwall shares with a few other spots on earth the ability to strip from man the accumulation of his experience and to give him the mind of a child or a savage that is still susceptible to the secret hostility of Nature. Gradually he once more succeeds in overlaying or blunting his perceptions by summoning to his aid the faculties of reason and judgment, the resources of education and the experience of civilization, until he is able to scoff at such an irrational panic; but for a little while he knows again the terrors that he thought had fled for ever when he left childhood behind him.

Mark fell a victim to this terror of place. He lay in bed oppressed by a kind of insurgence of the land through the windows of his room. He was appalled by such a sense of insecurity as an earthquake might have given him. Once he got out of bed and looked out at the night; but there was nothing terrible to be seen. The stars held to their courses; they were not wandering in the blackness of darkness for ever. Forty miles out beyond St. Levan's Bay the Stag Light was occulting and shining with perfect regularity. But as soon as Mark left the window and got back into bed again he felt the invading presence of this land; and when dawn broke he was as utterly tired as if he had been hag-ridden all night.

CHAPTER XXIII

EARTH

IN spite of his bad night, Mark did not stay in bed a moment after sunrise, but dressed himself and set out to walk to the Vicarage. Here was another well-remembered path. Not a gate had been added or taken away from that cart-track along the bottom of the valley, in the middle of which the Vicarage stood rather nearer to Church Cove than to Nancepean. The slopes of the low hills on either side were not blazing with gorse at this season; but there were a few bushes in bloom to catch the sun shining behind the tower of Chypic church and to remind Mark of the heavenly glow with which these hills had warmed his childish fancy. It was strange how utterly that menace of the land's hostility had vanished with the rising of the sun.

Here was the Vicarage gate at last. The holm-oaks on either side of the drive had grown so thick that the blue hydrangeas had been darkened out of existence; but they had always been scraggy and unhappy in the old days. When Mark walked past the house and stood on the undulating unsheared lawn, he was astonished at the wonderland of sub-tropical vegetation. He had been ready to be disappointed by the size of the garden and to find the vegetation less extravagant than the picture of it that had stayed in his mind ever since. But when thus he came back to it, he found it not less but more unusual than he had imagined. The sub-tropical trees planted by his grandfather had become specimens; and Mark wandered beneath immense leaves and gazed upon exotic flowers like a man set down in a new Eden. He felt like one who has wandered into the enchanted gardens of the Arabian Nights, like one of those fabled princes

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to whom the speech of birds is made known and who at the bidding of some topaz-throated songster penetrates more deeply into the perfumed labyrinth to save a princess languishing in solitude and captivity. The familiar colours and contours of the English woodland were not recognizable in these fans and cupolas and parasols of fervid and refulgent green.

The late Vicar had not attempted to cope with the jungle in which the house was now buried. He must have spent his whole life among the dust and worms of ancient commentaries in that ceaseless endeavour to establish the identity of the British nation with the lost tribes of Israel. No patriarch he, with tight paunch and flowing beard and moist uxorious eye, but a withered, anxious, crabbed wight, not more substantial than a colophon at the tail of one of his own chronicles. He had paid no heed to the lush growth without; but, deep in the shadows or the lamplight of his study, he had pored upon the plants of the Bible, on galbanum and gopher and teil, on camphire and cummin, and on the shittah-tree in the wilderness. He had not cared for the living palms; but he had sat for hours in faded woodcuts beneath their fronds, watching the camels at the drinking-pool and the porters of the caravan resting in the cool of the evening. Mark could not discover that the Reverend John Jacob Morse had taken the least interest in his active duties as a priest. He had apparently considered that the dissenting ministers and local preachers were better suited to the spiritual needs of his parish; and even his active co-operation with them did not extend beyond nibbling some bread and butter at a Band of Hope tea in the chapel, or shutting up the church on some political festival. Yet in spite of his negative qualities as a parish priest, the natural conservatism of the Cornish (expressed politically in acute radicalism) had already begun to glorify their late Vicar. He was by now a fine old chap, who had disturbed neither man nor beast in the whole of his twenty years at Nancepean. He already belonged to that legendary caste of mind, the like of which is not seen nowadays. This grubby, selfish, and solitary old man without any interest except an exploded

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ethnical superstition was to be held up to the new parson as an example of clerical worth, dignity, and merit. Better a dead ass than a live lion was the Cornish paradox. The very clothes-moths that crawled in and out of the pockets of his rusty black suits achieved in retrospect a kind of magical importance as if they were the symbols or personifications of his own moth-eaten brain and of the maggots of eccentric opinions that devoured it.

Mark went into the house and explored the endless empty rooms, deciding to furnish the dining-room and to take for his study his grandfather's old study where he had learnt Latin and watched the green windows winking with the flight of birds. He could furnish two bedrooms, and one should be the little bedroom in which he used to sleep as a child. The other should be his mother's old room, which he would invite friends to use next summer, a genial company.

Suddenly in this abode of silence and hollowness Mark began to feel a return of that enmity of place. These empty rooms were terrifying, because they seemed unable to oppose any barrier to the investment of the house by that hostile country without. Deprived of their own individuality when they ceased to be furnished and used by human beings, they had lost their relationship with humanity and were haunted by the spirits of place. The granite of which they were built had been wrested from the earth, and now the earth was wresting back that which man had robbed from it. This impression of the interior was cut so sharply on Mark's imagination that he turned to escape from it into the garden. Here in the sunlight the scent of the first acacias, the blossoms of a white clematis pouring in a shimmering torrent of foam over the high wall, the defiant torches of tall kniphofias, and the kindly music of the bamboo groves gave him an assurance that man had triumphed over this hostile country.

The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto

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it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God.

If this savage land had been tamed to bring forth such paradisial flowers, why should not the hearts of its people be turned to the worship and the love of God?

THE PARSON'S PROGRESS *will be*
brought to a conclusion in a final volume
called THE HEAVENLY LADDER.

